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THE KING'S MAIL.

THE KING'S MAIL.

BY
HENRY HOLL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE KING'S MAIL.

CHAPTER I.

THE FLOWER GIRL.

WITHOUT once pausing in his flight, Baxter kept on his way, and galloped for miles along the old Southampton road, his strong horse never once failing him, but bearing him upon his perilous course beyond the fear of danger, and the hue and cry of his pursuers.

It was not until after he had gained the far descending slope of the long Hog's Back, that he ventured to restrain his headlong speed, then striking through a country lane, turned to the right, and made his way in the direction of Farnham. His horse had saved his life, and he caressed and patted it, leaning over its neck, talking in familiar tones, praising its speed, and vowing there was not another horse like him in all England.

He dismounted when near a running brook, and pulling a handful of hay from a stack standing near the wayside, sopped it in the water, and saw his horse eat it, while he stood fondling, almost playing with it all the time, then with a wisp, rubbed down its sides and swept the foam from him. There was another ten miles' run in him yet, and Baxter looked about him with a laughing and defiant air for those who'd like to come and try it.

His horse stood nipping the grass growing by the roadside, while Baxter laid himself at his full length and drank of the clear stream a long hearty draught. He drank again and again, and had a bowl of his favourite punch been steaming by his side, would not have turned from the brook, of which he drank his fill, and never thought water half so sweet before.

"This Adam's ale," he cried, "is not such bad tippie after all, when a man is thirsty and has his work to do. I only wish poor Mike were here to have a drink of it, instead of all the doctor's stuff he'll have to swallow unless they choke him off before his arm gets well. If he were only here, we would make a shift to carry him, wouldn't we, Jack? You'd carry double for once, and think

nothing of it, wouldn't you, old boy, and give them the go by after all?"

His horse replied in the best way it could, arching its neck, pawing with its foot, and switching its tail, finishing by thrusting its nose right into its master's breast, as he stood stroking it down, and slapping its broad chest.

"Time's up," cried Baxter, once more throwing himself into the saddle; "but you may take it easy now, Jack; there's lots of time and to spare, so long as those gentlemen are out of sight."

He rode along through pleasant lanes for some way further, then striking across the country towards Farnham, put up at a decent inn for the night, attended personally to the grooming and feeding of his horse, and the next day pursued his way to London.

He had no fear of being recognized; the chances were all in his favour, and with anything like luck, he thought he should get well out of the scrape after all. The first thing to do was to change his lodging and keep Bridgeman under control. He had seen enough of him to know there was no dependence to be placed on him, he was too nervous to be trusted at a push, and too selfish, even if he were less nervous, to think of any one but himself. But then Bridgeman was

afraid of him, that he knew well enough, and with a little management might run in harness quietly enough; if he only kept a tight rein on him.

The news of Garroway's apprehension, although perhaps to have been expected, came upon them like a thunderbolt, and Baxter had not only to endure his own share of anxiety and regret, but to keep his friend and companion within bounds, who would have shown a fair pair of heels, and ran away beyond the reach of danger at the first news of it. But both men were alike in this, they had no means beyond the income obtained by the exercise of their wits; and though they had hitherto found that capital pay a good interest, they knew that interest was uncertain, and their whole fortunes depending upon chance: one day worth thousands, the next without a guinea. Baxter knew this well enough, and endeavoured to persuade the irresolute Bridgeman into a knowledge of his true position, and the uselessness of flight. He had strong faith in Garroway, for with all his love of finery, he had invariably found Mike true to his word and consistent in his dealings—they might hang him, but he would never peach.

With Bridgeman he would not have been quite so sure; he was a coward and sufficiently selfish to think only of himself. Had *he* a

chance of saving his neck by betraying others, he would do it, let who might suffer ; and the very knowledge of what he would do himself, operated so strongly on him, he would have scampered away and shipped himself beyond seas, even at the risk of having to work for his living, or of begging in the public streets. Baxter, on the contrary, had a bull-dog stubbornness about him ; *he* would never fly, he would face his danger and not sneak from it as Bridgeman would have done. He was a bold, reckless, daring fellow, with a strong sense of honour about him, after his own fashion, and to save or serve a friend, would have braved anything, or sacrificed himself.

But as the time drew near for Garroway's trial, an aching sense of dread fell upon both men, and shifting from their old quarters, they took lodgings in the noiseless thoroughfare turning out of St. Martin's Lane, called May's Buildings, where they could lie *perdu*, and wait the result.

None of their friends knew where they lived, and the two men gave up, for the time, all visits to their haunts, keeping within doors day and night as well, their heads aching from the close confinement, and fevered by their nightly drink. Bridgeman had given up claret and taken to

punch instead, and night by night went staggering to bed. But even then he had a nervous fear about him, and would not go to bed at all unless Baxter slept in the same room with him, and kept his pistols under his pillow. He knew Jack would fight, so he had a chance of escape, even if the worst came to the worst.

The trial had taken place the day before, and up and down the narrow court the newsmen went, blowing their horns, and shouting out their tidings of how the highwayman had been tried at Guildford, together with a full, true, and particular account of the summing up of the judge, and the sentence passed upon the culprit. A newspaper was quickly purchased, and Baxter read the news, pausing at every word, and inspecting the opened-out sheet with breathless expectation.

At last the sentence came! Garroway was found guilty. He was condemned to die, but he had not betrayed his friends.

"Poor Mike!" sighed Baxter, laying the paper down, and leaning with his hand pressed over his brows.

Bridgeman gulped his punch, and said, "Poor fellow! poor Mike! and not to split on us after all. I had no idea there was so much pluck in him."

"Pluck!" cried Baxter, dashing his hand

across his eyes, "Pluck ! Mike has more pluck under an inch of his fine red coat than you have in your whole body. You would have sold us out and out—hung us like dogs, so you could have saved your own neck. Mike's heart is in the right place, although he is a little squeamish now and then, and fond of finery as a woman ; but time's up, and poor Mike will swing."

His hand was pressed over his face again, and the strong man sat sobbing silently, though audibly.

Bridgeman was silent too, but his brow was brighter than before they had read the news, and though he appeared to feel for Mike, yet in his heart he wished the time had come that he would be dead and buried, since die he must, and he relieved from any fear of his making a confession. At last he said—

"Do you think he will confess after all, Jack? Those parsons get hold of a fellow at such times as these, and worm the truth out of him before he is aware of it."

"Do I think you are a selfish hound who think only of yourself, and would hang him with your own hands, if you could only make sure of him?" cried Baxter, starting up in his chair, and looking fiercely out of his red and but half-dried eyes.

“Oh ! I only meant to say——”

“I know what you say, and what you mean, as well as you do yourself, so hold your tongue, and if you are not too drunk when you go to bed say a prayer for the poor fellow, and wish you may die as true, if not as honest a man.”

There was no more to be said to this. Baxter was evidently roused, and Bridgeman knew it, so he sat drinking his punch in dogged silence, and appeared to think himself an ill-used gentleman, while Baxter read the trial over again, and again, in the “Evening Post,” leaving his companion to grow fuddled with his drink, and at the last walk off in the sulks, staggering to bed.

They had only a few guineas left between them. Something must be done to raise the wind and bring in fresh supplies ; so Baxter sold his watch, and the next night the two men went out again as usual, visiting their old haunts, playing for small sums, and running as little risk of losing as possible. They had bad luck of it at first, but by little and little they won what they had lost back again, and added a few more guineas to their store. Both men played nervously, but after a time Bridgeman lost his head drinking punch, and spoiled the game, so they lost again.

Baxter had kept himself sober, and watched

the cards fall down as though his very life depended on them. Still bad luck, so Baxter took to punch as well, which only had the effect of clearing his head and exciting him to bolder ventures. He won this time, so the punch was swilled again. He won again, and whilst the drunken and incapable Bridgeman sat sleeping in his chair, Baxter drank deeper, and staked higher than he had done. His head was clear enough now; he would have played with any man, and risked his last sixpence on a card.

He had won hundreds. Cards or dice, it was all one to him; he was in for a run of luck, and swept the table clear of notes and guineas.

They had sat for hours, and when the daylight broke in upon the room, he roused Bridgeman from his heavy slumber, and shaking him by the arm, told him to "get up and come along." Tom rubbed his eyes, jumped up with a start, and stared at Baxter with a frightened expression, as though he half expected to see a constable instead. He had evidently not forgotten his fears of Mike Garroway's peaching on him.

They left the house together, and turning through the streets, gray with the early daylight, directed their steps towards their lodgings. Baxter was "well up in the stirrups," as he said, and

fit for anything. Bridgeman, on the contrary, was fit for nothing, but skulking along in the shadow of the houses, kept a good look-out before him and behind him.

“What the devil are you after, Tom?” cried Baxter, losing patience, when he saw his companion so bent on choosing the back and narrow turnings. “You are not on Hind Head now, nor taking a run for it from your friends at Godalming. You haven’t the heart of a mouse in you, and the last few weeks have turned you from the dashing fellow you used to be, into a woman.”

“It’s all the fault of punch, Jack,” said Bridgeman, looking before him, while he watched a distant figure approaching from the far end of St. Martin’s Lane. “If I had only stuck to claret, I shouldn’t have these tremblings over me, but I can’t help it, for who knows but Mike may split upon us after all. Life is sweet, and if you have a chance of saving it——”

“You’d hang your friend, I suppose,” interrupted Baxter. “I’ll take good care how I give you a chance of hanging me.” Then seeing how his companion came to a dead halt as he stood looking before him at the distant figure, cried, “What are you lagging back for now? and what

are you gaping at, with your two moons of eyes in that way for?"

"Don't you—don't you see somebody there?" half hiccuped Bridgeman, pointing to the figure.

"What if I do?" replied Baxter. "There is nothing to frighten one in a market-woman carrying a basket on her head, is there?"

"Oh! if it's only a woman, and you are sure it's a woman, she be hanged. I thought perhaps Mike had confessed, and——"

"Not he, he's true as steel, and here is the woman, basket and all."

They were close to the turning leading to their lodgings now, and as they drew near it, they met a girl carrying a basket of flowers on her head, coming from early market at Covent Garden. They met face to face, and the girl moved a little on one side, with the intention of letting the men pass by, for Bridgeman was rather unsteady on his legs, and Baxter's strong arm had to keep him from swaying about.

The girl stared first at one then the other, then fixed her gaze on Baxter, with a curious open-eyed expression. Baxter looked at her too, while a half recollection came upon him of having seen her face somewhere before. The girl was

about to pass him, when he placed himself full in her way, and said—

“Down with your basket, wench, and let us look at your posies. Why, you look as blooming as they do, only a little careworn, to my thinking. Here—here is half-a-crown for you, so give me a bunch worth smelling at.”

The girl put her basket down, picked out the best she had and handed it to him.

Baxter took it, put the money in her hand, and was walking away, when she said, “I have no change, sir.”

“Keep it and buy some meat with it. You look as though you wanted blood in your veins. Your face is pretty enough, but there’s too much of the colour of new milk about it, to my fancy, and wants a dash of one of your own posies to give it a little red and white.”

There was plenty of red and white in the girl’s face, when she replied, “You had better take more flowers, sir, as I can’t give you change.”

“How much for the lot?” stammered Bridgeman, trying to chuck the girl under the chin; “Jack’s fond of flowers, so let him keep the basket and I’ll have the missus.”

Half frightened by the staggering movements of Bridgeman, the girl was running past them,

when Baxter jerked him back and cried, "None of your tricks, Tom, and keep your hands off the girl, for she appears honest, and has a sickly look about her, as though she had too soon got out of a sick bed, or something very like it."

The girl flushed to the eyes again, then taking up her basket, dropped him a curtsy, and with the money in her hand, passed on, while Bridgeman swung himself half round with a view of catching hold of her, and nearly stumbled over Baxter in the attempt, who, wrenching him up again with a sudden jerk, kept him from falling.

"Steady, Tom!" cried Baxter, "and no tricks, as I said before. You are mighty courageous all of a sudden."

"Of course I am. Do you think I fear a woman as much as I do a constable? Not a bit of it, and if Bow Street runners would only put on petticoats, I should be running after *them* instead of their running after *me*. It is a weakness of mine, and punch always makes it worse."

They were at the court now, and close to their lodgings, when Baxter turned and looked back after the girl, who was standing some short distance off, with her basket of flowers on her head, looking after them as well, with a curious, yet earnest expression in her face.

They were flush of money now, and the next day treated themselves to a ride through Highgate on to Finchley, and so round to Hampstead, dining at Jack Straw's castle, and having a day's clear "out" of it. Baxter was in good spirits when the dinner came; but on the road he was moody and out of sorts, as though his recollection were busy with the last ride he had had with Bridgeman, and appeared to miss the third companion, who had laughed and chatted with them when riding down from London with Martin Blakeborough, to look at his old house and talk their secret matters over. Two of them were on their horses still; of Blakeborough he had heard nothing, although he had promised to write to him; and Garroway—where was he? In the condemned cell in Guildford Jail, waiting his execution. Baxter could think of nothing else, and walking his horse up the steep of Highgate Hill, kept drawing pictures in his fancy of Mike upon his straw, and the gallows ready to be set up. He had half a mind to turn his horse, and gallop off to see him. If he had only had a dozen like himself he would have done it, too, and battered down the gate to get at him; but what could one man do, and he in danger of the same trial, and the same condemned cell, if he were taken? It

was no use thinking of it; but, though he tried to drive it from him, the recollection of the prison cell would flit across his mind, making him droop his head, and ride along in silent thought.

Bridgeman did not seem to think at all, but kept whistling with a careless air, and appeared less afraid now he was on the open road than when walking through the crowded streets. There was no one to stare at him there, or pounce upon him when he least expected it. The old women he met he could have ridden over, while the few stragglers on the paths only touched their hats, and went on lazily to their daily work. *They* were not constables, and what did Bridgeman care for them? Not the snap of his fingers! And he went whistling on, looking at Baxter every now and then with a sidelong glance, wondering what he was thinking of, and if it were of Mike. He thought of him himself sometimes, and speculated what *he* was thinking of, and whether he trembled, as he should have done, at the thought of the hangman and his horrid noose.

The bowl of punch after dinner cheered them up, but Baxter would not let his companion drink too much of it. There was more money to be won that night, he hoped, and Bridgeman must

keep his head clear, and try his knowing hand in assisting him to win it.

“You have had enough, Tom, to do you good, and not another drop shall you swallow if I know it; so don’t keep looking at the bowl as though you wanted to drain the dregs and suck the bits of lemon at the bottom. A month ago you were as steady and sober as a judge. Now you’re as fond of drink as a drayman.”

“It’s all the fault of the Devil’s Punch Bowl, Jack. It was that first put drinking in my mind. If that infernal hollow were only filled with it, well sugared, and flavoured to my liking, I think I could be content to be drowned in it. Claret’s a cold drink after all, and the sight of it gives me a shiver now.” Lifting the empty bowl, he drained the few remaining drops into his glass, and sucked them down as if they were drops of nectar; then, turning it about between his hands, cried, “They call that a bowl, do they? A lady’s chocolate cup would hold as much for her morning’s sip. There’s nothing like a pint apiece, and I could drink a gallon.”

“I tell you what it is, Tom,” said Baxter, leaning across the table, “if you go on in the way you have begun much longer, you’ll be as very a drunkard as any in St. Giles’s. You have

taken to it naturally, as a Red Indian does to rum, and would sell your soul for it. Mind it does not endanger your neck some day as well."

The reference to his neck put Bridgeman in mind of Garroway. He placed the bowl on the table, and said nothing more.

They had a long night's play before them; so, mounting their horses, Baxter and his companion left the pleasant fields and the delightful village behind them, galloped back to town, put their horses up at a neighbouring stable, then sought their out-of-the-way lodgings in May's Buildings.

They had a stake worth playing for now, and, with any luck, might double it, and double that again. Bridgeman's head was clear enough, and his known skill, and dexterous application of it, made him a dangerous one for any man to try chances with; and that night, at all events, he meant to do his best.

The night came, and they went arm in arm to try their luck.

Who were those two men leaning on the mantel-piece, talking to each other by the fire? They were the two foreign Counts who had stripped them of their winnings the night before they met Blakeborough at the "Angel Inn." No

sooner had Bridgeman cast eyes on them than he slapped his hand upon his thigh, and said "he would teach them a trick or two worth knowing, if they'd only give them their revenge. It was their turn now, and, with the luck in the right quarter, they would win their losses back again—Bridgeman his three hundred, and Baxter the four hundred he had won of Martin Blakeborough."

Their party was speedily made up ; and, until the daylight streamed into the room, they sat and played—then the place was cleared, the lights put out, the door of the gaming-house closed, and winners and losers went away to think of what they had lost or won, or might win or lose next night.

The flower-girl, with her basket on her head, went toiling through the early-lighted street, the morning's sun shining upon windows and glowing on the chimney-tops, while the pavement was yet moist with dew. The girl walked on, and, almost on the same spot, met the two men who had stopped her, and bought a nosegay of her the day before ; but they passed her now without even noticing her, or buying any of her flowers. The thick-set man merely glanced at her, while his companion walked moodily along, with his hands buried in his pockets, and did not appear

so tipsy as he was the morning before. They never turned to look at her this time; but, with their eyes fixed on the pavement, went silently along, and entering the same court, passed on their way.

The girl watched them out of sight; then, settling her basket on head, went toiling on to sell her flowers.

CHAPTER II.

THE PARCEL.

BAXTER and his companion sat sulkily over their morning's meal; their old ill luck had come upon them, and the two foreign Counts had stripped them of every guinea. Bridgeman's watch had gone to keep company with Baxter's, and they had nothing now they could raise money upon to give them a chance of retrieving their past losses. Baxter had his horse, it was true, but he felt he would rather starve than part with it. Bridgeman's was only hired from the stables round the corner, so they could not sell that; and even if they could, his worth was a mere trifle.

Their week's rent was due, with sundry things to pay, and they without a shilling to meet the woman's claim. They could not play without money, and without money what were they to do? They had plenty of friends who would lose their guineas to them, and pay them if they lost; but they would not lose, and find the stakes at

the same time ; and both men thought they could rather suffer anything than come to that pass.

Something must be done, or they should be turned out of the lodgings, which suited them just now better than any other. It was a quiet, out-of-the-way quarter of the town, and while the news of the mail robbery was still talked of, and the men who robbed it were described in the newspapers, they thought the wisest thing to do was to keep out of sight for a time, and only venture in the streets by night, and then cautiously, avoiding the more frequented thoroughfares. They had only had one day's pleasure since they had been hiding there, riding to Hampstead, and dining at Jack Straw's Castle ; but the money won the overnight had put Baxter in good spirits then, and he thought less of Garroway than he did now sitting in that dull room, in that close court, wondering if they would execute him after all.

They sat without speaking for some time, Bridgeman making impossible calculations of chances on a piece of paper, and Baxter playing with a pack of cards, trying to make it out how the foreign Counts could always win in the way they had done. He rose at last, and looking out of the window stood staring for some time at the

opposite houses, or watching the people pass and repass up that narrow way. Leaning with his forehead on his hand upon the window-sash, he stood busy in his thoughts, and casting about what he had best do.

Bridgeman gave up his calculations at last, and went to the cupboard to see if there were any rum left in it to mix a glass of punch with. He had hardly looked inside when Baxter, turning sharply round, told him to go to the coffee-house in St. Martin's Lane, and ask if any letter had been left for him. Blakeborough and Upton were both in the habit of addressing their letters there, and one or both of them might have written; and yet they had never inquired whether they had written or not.

Bridgeman had a stray shilling left in the corner of his pocket. It was not much, but a shilling's worth of punch was better than nothing when a man had a fit of the blues on him, and nothing to drink to frighten them away with; so Tom took his hat, and went upon his double errand of inquiry and punch.

He had been some time gone—Baxter all the while fuming and fidgeting up and down the room, or looking out of the window towards the entrance of the court, when he saw Bridgeman

turn the corner, smacking his lips, and carrying a small parcel in his hand.

“You have been long enough to have brought a haystack on your back,” cried Baxter angrily, when Bridgeman re-entered the apartment, “instead of a bit of tied-up paper like this. I know what you have been after well enough, and if you don’t mind what you are about, you’ll be waking out of your first sleep to get a suck at the brandy bottle. After dinner a man may do what he likes, if he has the head and stomach for it; but morning drinking is the devil, and will send you to him in no time. Let me see what you have there. Give it me, and don’t keep fumbling at the knot when there is a knife to cut it with.”

The parcel was addressed—“John Baxter, Esq. To be left at the Coffee-house, St. Martin’s Lane, until called for.” A coin had been pressed upon the wax that fastened it, and an imperfect copy of King George’s head was the only seal it bore; but the wax had not been broken, nor the string untied. Baxter slit it from the cover with a knife, and both men stood looking with curious eyes at what the contents might be. There was no letter in it, nothing to show from whom it came; but closely folded in an inner cover,

sealed and bound up as the first had been, lay another parcel. This was opened too, and when the contents were spread upon the table, Baxter and his companion scanned them with eager and delighted eyes. They had a chance of paying rent and charges now. The foreign Counts might yet be brought to book; and if he only caught them cheating, or with concealed cards playing a false game with him, he'd knock their heads together, or pistol them at Chalk Farm.

"Let me catch 'em at it," cried Baxter, "that's all."

The whole of that day they kept in doors, idling their time or spelling through the newspaper, reading it from the beginning to the end, until all the news was exhausted, and there was nothing left to read, when the two men sat down and began playing at cards, trying to cheat each other, and giving the other a chance of finding it out if he could. They shuffled them all ways, marked the king, and tried again and again to find the plan by which the foreign Counts could always get it in their hands; but Bridgeman was too sharp, and Baxter was always being found out—he was not half so clean a hand at it as Tom, who could cheat him "with his eyes shut," as he said. How, then, had the foreign Counts

contrived to cheat such a knowing one as he was? They were both puzzled, but yet sat playing, trying all they knew on purpose to venture on a hand with them again.

The packet had arrived at a lucky nick of time, and if they could only turn it to account they could try bolder hazards than ever with the pair of Counts; and though the cards had fallen cross, the dice must tumble rightly, and perhaps win back what they had lost the over-night.

But they had a cautious game to play, and could not afford to run risks. The excitement of the robbery was yet too recent, and until it had subsided a little it would be madness to make use of the means that had come so unexpectedly into their possession; they must wait, and so must the two Counts, for the revenge they meant to have of them.

Baxter stowed the packet safely in his trunk, and began casting about for the means of supplying their more immediate wants, by raising some few shillings on such odd things as they could spare, and at night resorted to the lowest class of gambling-houses, playing for small stakes, and making a shift to live for a few weeks, borrowing—although against their wills—

small sums from their more immediate friends. They had quite abandoned their former haunts, and never ventured to play among the old lot. Their stakes were too high, and shillings were of more consequence to them now than guineas had been once.

No one knew where they lived, nor were they ever seen together, as they had been—playing deeply at night, or lounging and laughing about Bond Street and St. James's by day. Their friends had never set eyes on them since the night Baxter and his companion had been cleaned out by the two Counts; but then *they* won of everybody, and at last came to be shunned as much as Nic Upton and Mr. Martin once had been. They had never been found out in actual cheating it was true, but one thing was equally certain—they always won.

Time flew by. Mike Garroway was hung, and for a while the two men kept aloof even from their usual place of meeting; and when they went abroad at last, a change had come on both their faces—Baxter's was pale and sallow, and there was a dogged air about him few men would like to rouse; while Bridgeman drank more than ever, and was always sotting at any one's expense. So long as he obtained drink it did not

matter how, or by what means. He had an odd way of starting too, and of looking behind him when there was no one near him; and when a man was executed at Newgate in the morning—which was by no means an unusual occurrence—Bridgeman was always dead drunk at night; while Baxter was more inclined to quarrel, and would fight any one who spoke louder than he liked, or dared to contradict him. They were unpopular even in the low haunts they mixed in now, and few of the frequenters cared to play or speak with them; for Bridgeman, drunk or sober, was more than a match for them at games of skill, while Baxter was savage and quarrelsome when he lost.

It was after a night of this sort, sitting moodily in their dull room, the two men held an earnest talk. It was impossible to go on in that way much longer, and unless something turned up to set them on their legs, Baxter thought he would sell his horse, and with what he fetched ship himself off to America.

A bold stroke was the only thing to save them now, and the time had come to try it.

It was dusk, but Bridgeman could not be prevailed upon to do what Baxter wished him. He did not want "to dance upon nothing," he

said, or take a morning's airing outside Newgate; but a glass of his favourite liquor made him think better of it, and as the fumes mounted to his head he drew his neckcloth well over his chin, and cocked his hat on one side, so as to give him a certain character different from his ordinary look; while Baxter went out dressed as he usually was, and walking up St. Martin's Lane, the two men gazed in at the lighted shops, first up one side of the way, then the other.

After a few more turns, Baxter went into one of the shops, and at the end of a brief interval returned to where he had left his companion, but he was not there; so up and down St. Martin's Lane he walked, looking for him in the different shops, and wondering where he had gone to. At last he saw him, his hat still cocked on one side, and with rather an unsteady gait, coming from the direction of the coffee-house.

"All right, Jack!" cried Bridgeman, with a thick, indistinct utterance. "I thought a glass of punch would be a good excuse, and—all's right!" Here he dived his hand into his pocket, jingling the gold he had in it.

"I have done it without fuddling myself with drink, and soddening my brain like a stewed

prune. But let us be off, this will do for to-night; to-morrow we must beat up fresh quarters."

They had money in their pockets now, and once again they ventured among their old associates, who welcomed them like old friends. The lighted room, the familiar faces, acted like magic on them; and the gloomy and mistrustful men soon forgot the needy want by which they had been so long oppressed, and the sad experience they had lived through. They were quickly drawn into play, and though at first Baxter determined to keep to small stakes, the excitement soon carried him away, and he was as eager to bet and play at anything that came, or for any amount, as he had ever been when he had had thousands in his pocket.

They won and lost—lost and won again, with more equal chances than when the foreign Counts had played with them. There was some life in this, and even Bridgeman left off looking behind his chair, or sitting in a corner, though he almost tumbled backward when one of their companions asked him "what had become of Mike Garroway, and whether he were dead or alive."

"Oh, he's abroad!" cried Baxter, with a

nervous twitching about the corners of his mouth ; "but he's all well, I hope."

"There's no occasion to wish a man well in such a solemn way as that," rejoined the speaker, "you could not talk more seriously if he were at his last gasp, and the doctor had finished him off."

The next night they made a second expedition into St. Martin's Lane, when Baxter tried another shop, and Bridgeman another glass of punch, and came staggering out jingling money in his pocket, as he done the night before.

The next night Baxter waited for him longer than usual, and thought he must be having two glasses of punch instead of one ; but he came out of the coffee-house at last, and hurrying on to where Baxter stood, beckoned him up a court. He was pale and trembling ; his punch had been left untasted ; he had not changed his note, for the people were talking of one of the shopkeepers living in St. Martin's Lane, having been taken up to Bow Street, charged with passing one of the bank-notes stolen out of the mail-bags on Hind Head Heath.

They walked hurriedly down Bedfordbury, and so by the backways through Little May's Buildings to their lodgings, where they sat with

blanched faces, listening to the newsmen blowing their horns, and crying out the news.

They sent their landlady's boy for an "Evening Post," and read the examination at Bow Street of a man who kept a shop in St. Martin's Lane, who had paid away a note stolen from the banker's remittances, sent by the Portsmouth mail on the night it was stopped and robbed. He had been examined at some length, and in defending himself from the charge, said he had given change for it to a gentleman—a thick-set, burly-looking man, who had come into his shop a night or two before; and so he came by it, and had paid it away in the ordinary course of business. His character being good and his trade respectable, the charge was dismissed, and he left the court with a caution from the magistrate not to change notes for strange people any more. But though the shopkeeper was discharged, the note had been detained, and the officers were told to be on the alert to find the man who had passed it.

Baxter drew a long breath, and said he must keep in doors, and so must Bridgeman too, or the punch at the coffee-house might disagree with him. It would not do for them to run unnecessary risks by walking through the streets,

nor could they attempt to change any additional notes in St. Martin's Lane, or anywhere else, at present, but must find out fresh lodgings, and slip away from where they were, as soon as possible.

All that night and the following day they kept in doors, and never stirred across the threshold, for fear some sharp-eyed watcher should look at them more closely than they wished; and they amused themselves as they best could by staring into the narrow passage through the chinks of the drawn blinds, watching the passers-by go up and down, and through the dingy court pursue their busy way.

He had been watching for some time, when from the far end, there came a shuffling pair of feet, and shambling down the court from the turning next Bedfordbury, Baxter saw an old wrinkled Jew come hurriedly along. He knew him at a glance, and drawing the curtain closer still, stood watching him from behind its shelter.

There he was talking to people at doorways, asking them questions, and pointing towards St. Martin's Lane. Leaving them at last, he shuffled to the entrance of the court, where he stood for a while evidently at a loss, yet busy in

some search or other, or hunting for something he had lost.

Baxter knew the risk he ran, but for all that he could not help opening the window, and leaning out, looked after him. There he was standing at the corner of the court, talking to a man dressed in a drab great-coat, with leathers and top-boots to match; and as he looked he saw the Jew put his hand in his pocket, pull out a greasy bag, and slip something into the man's hand, who pocketed the coin with an air of easy independence, buttoned his coat, then arm in arm with the Jew walked back into the court, while Baxter drew in his head, and watched them as they came along asking questions of everyone they met, and talking earnestly of something they were evidently much interested in.

The night came stealing on at last, when the woman was paid her rent; and sending for a hackney-coach, with orders to draw up in Bedfordbury, Baxter had their boxes carried to it, while he and his friend muffled their faces in the best way they were able, and with their hats pulled over their eyes, slunk from the doorway of the house; then getting into the coach, told the man to drive to the "Old Bell," in Holborn,

and on their arrival there, pretended they had come too late to catch the Exeter Mail.

Meanwhile the coach was dismissed, and their boxes carried into the inn yard ; but as the mail had been gone more than half an hour, and they had no chance of overtaking it, they shifted their luggage into another hackney-coach ; drove to Tottenham Court Road, where they discharged the second coach, and leaving their luggage at a public-house, went searching through the back streets for lodgings.

CHAPTER III.

AN OLD FRIEND WITH A NEW FACE.

THEY were safely housed at last, in poor-looking rooms enough in John Street, lying at the back of Tottenham Court Road ; but they were away from the immediate neighbourhood of St. Martin's Lane, that was one comfort, and had time to think a little.

They did not venture out on that, nor the next night, or the two following days ; but all the time sat poring over odds and ends of books they had discovered on a shelf in the room, until they had spelt them through and through, and could make nothing of them after all. Bridgeman hated books, and Baxter was not too well inclined to literary pursuits himself. Sometimes they gazed out of the window, and stood looking at the rain, which, for the whole two days and nights they had kept indoors, had fallen incessantly, drenching the streets, and choking the gutters, until the road swam with a large pool, to the no small glory of the boys, who, with their paper boats or

bits of wood, never thought of rain or anything else, so long as there was a puddle large enough to float their tiny vessels, or for them to dabble in. Here they stood watching by the hour together, looking at the opposite windows, or at the water running off the tiles of the houses, until they were sick of rain, puddles, windows, tiles, and all !

The old paper on the walls was blurred and faded, and the pattern almost drove Baxter wild as he went counting how many spots there were in every line, and how the lines kept crossing and recrossing, and then again went sloping off in other lines of countless spots and stars. The very mantel-piece was a positive annoyance to them. The small garlands of flowers, with the composition bunches of ribbons binding them together, all painted in staring white, with myriads of points and dots running up and down, or circling round and round, in fanciful attempts at ornament, made them crazy. And when night came, and lights were called for, the brass candlesticks stood in the centre of the baize cover, without a thing else upon it, and they without amusement, or anything to do, or say, but what they had done and said a thousand times before. But there was no help for it—keep in doors they

must, or run the chance of something worse than walls covered with faded paper, or composition wreaths stuck on the mantel-piece.

On the third night they ventured out again, and, calling a hackney coach, drove to the gaming-house, where they sat themselves down in one of the rooms, pleased with the contrast, and delighted by the change of scene and company by which they were surrounded. If such a life were to last as they had lived through the last two days, Baxter thought he would rather take the shilling and enlist for a soldier; while Bridgeman could drink himself to death, and die of premature combustion.

All that was over now, and they were only the more jovial, jumping, as it were, from such a horrible collapse into a state of glow and warmth. Here they could laugh and chat, live in a whirl of pleasure, and in the terrible excitement of the gaming-table live as they had been used to live. It came upon their jaded spirits like the morning dram comes to the drunkard, infusing fresh life, and fitting them for the unnatural excitement they lived in.

Their friends, the Counts, were not there that night—at least, they had not seen them; but in one of the lower rooms they soon engaged in

play, with varying success for some hours. Baxter was almost reckless in his daring, and though he sometimes won by it, his losses were proportionably heavier than they would otherwise have been ; but the cool, calculating Bridgeman soon set them straight again, for, whilst his head was clear and unclouded by the fumes of punch, there was not much chance of winning from him.

There came a pause in the game, when Bridgeman spoke to his friend apart—

“I tell you what, Jack—that style of yours may break a bank once in a lifetime, but the odds are, you’ll break your own first, and who’s to find the counters then ? You never reckon chances, but pitch your money down like a greenhorn ; and the end will be, you’ll be plucked like a tame pigeon.”

“I am no match for you, I know ; but after the last two days, I feel as though I would rather lose every guinea we have in a single main, and blow my brains out afterwards, than face those horrid candlesticks and that everlasting stripe upon the walls. But let us go to the other room. There is something up. This place is almost empty, and the men keep flocking through that door as though there were something worth looking at.”

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The apartment they entered was well lighted, like the one they had just left ; but was generally devoted to single matches, or deeper and more important play, although, like the rest of the rooms, it was open to all comers. There was plenty of gold, and glass, and lustres—glittering drops sparkling with prismatic rays ; while on the tables lamps and branching candelabra threw out their yellow glare ; and the whole place was brilliant with many and various lights. And there in the midst, a crowd of men were gathered round a table, watching with eager curiosity some play more exciting than usual ; while heavy bets went circling round upon the chances of the game.

Bridgeman sat himself down at a table, and called for a bowl of punch, while Baxter went to see what the men crowded round for, and who the players were.

One of his friends, the Counts, was sitting playing *écarté* with a man in a large beard, and a cap upon the top of his head ; his braided and tasselled coat giving him a half-military, half-foreign appearance. And there between them lay a pile of notes and gold upon the table, which was quickly swept to the Count's side, as the cards were thrown down, and a fresh pack called for.

His other friend, the second Count, stood at some little distance behind his friend and countryman. Baxter was on the point of calling on him to give him his revenge, when the play recommenced, and, like the rest of the lookers-on, he soon became an interested spectator of what he saw, and forgot all about the money he meant to win from his friend, Count number two.

The man with the cap lost again, and again another pile of gold changed sides, as he called to his antagonist to keep from the table, and hold his hands well up, then told the other Count to move further off. "He did not want to play two of them at once, one was enough at a time in all conscience."

Another game was played, and again the Count turned up the king.

"The devil's in the cards!" cried the man with the beard, dashing them out of his hand. "There never was such luck. He holds more kings than there will be thrones for them soon."

The waiter brought a fresh pack.

"Here! give them to me; I'll have first shuffle this time; and do you, Monsieur Count, sit further off, and not keep trying to have a peep at my hand in the way you have done." The latter portion of the sentence

was addressed to the Count's companion, who, shrugging his shoulders, withdrew a little in the rear of his countryman, but without making a reply.

Baxter started at the sound of the voice, then looked intently at the man with the beard.

"Is he a foreigner?" inquired Baxter, of some one at his side, who was watching, as he was, the chances of the game.

"He has been speaking all the night in a sort of Frenchified style, but just now he spoke mother English as well as the best of us."

"Have they been playing long?" asked Baxter.

"Hours."

"Who has won? But I can see that at a glance."

"I'll bet you an even twenty on the Count this deal."

"Done," said Baxter.

But this time the Count lost, so Baxter pocketed his guineas, moved to the Count's side of the table, and had a good stare at the man in the cap and beard, who, raising his eyes as if to satisfy himself his antagonist was sufficiently away from the edge of the table, and that his hands were held well up, met Baxter's inquiring

gaze fixed on him. Sinking his eyes again upon his cards, the game went on.

The glance was sufficient, and without taking further notice, Baxter stepped across the room to where he had left Bridgeman, busy with the punch he had ordered, and whispered something in his ear. Bridgeman stared, rose from the table, after draining his glass, walked with Baxter behind the Count's chair, stared as Baxter had done before him, at the strange man, winked at him with a knowing wink, then glanced at the Count's cards, and watched the play.

He was evidently not wanted there. The Count's companion began fidgiting at the near neighbourhood of Bridgeman, and tried to edge himself between him and his friend. The bets rose high and higher, still Bridgeman stood watching behind the Count's chair. His companion gave a slight cough and the Count lost again.

The man in the foreign-looking cap scraped up his gold with a satisfied air, as he said, "I thought the luck could not go on in this way for ever. The wind is in my quarter now, so I'll play you double, cher ami, this time—*si vous voulez?*"

"*Bien.*"

Another game began, but before it reached half way to the end, Bridgeman slunk off to his

punch, and sat drinking at his table, while Baxter watched the Count's play with all the eyes he had, partly for his own sake, and partly with a desire of seeing all fair towards the gentleman in the cap, who, but a moment before, had glanced at him a second time. The Count to all appearance played fairly enough, and though he watched him with all the eyes he had, he could detect nothing to his prejudice. His companion did not cough this time. The Count turned up the king and won the double stakes.

They went on playing, the Count still winning, the foreign-looking man staking desperately upon every game. He had lost a heap of piled up notes and guineas, and pulled his pocket-book out for a fresh supply, when one or two of the bystanders endeavoured to persuade him to leave off, the luck was so dead against him, they said; but he turned on them fiercely and savagely, swearing he would lose every guinea, but he would try his luck still further. And once again the foreign-looking gentleman spoke unmistakable English.

"I tell you what it is, *mon ami*, you or I must be cleared out before we leave this table, that I am quite bent on, though if the luck runs in the way it has done, it won't be long before I

am drained dry as pasteboard. But we have had enough of this slow work, so let us rattle the bones a bit by way of change, and see if the dice will fall, as the kings have done, all in a heap, to your side of the table."

With a half beckon with his head he signed to Baxter, who, passing to his side, whispered something in his ear. The gentleman in the braided coat whispered something in return, and as he did so, looked across the table in the direction of the two Counts, who were talking in whispers together. Baxter nodded, then went back to his old spot to watch the game.

Large sums of money had been lost. The lookers on had won and lost as well, but at last the luck set in so much one way, and the man with the beard played so impatiently, no one would bet on him. Skilful as he was, and up to every move of the game, he was growing reckless, almost desperate at his continued ill-fortune, and appeared inclined to do as he had said, lose his last guinea, unless the dice should prove more friendly to him than the cards had been.

He drank a tumbler of wine and wiped his brow, while the Count sipped his lemonade, and looked as cool and comfortable as though he had just emerged from a cold bath.

The dice were brought. The Count did not even glance at them, but the half-foreign looking man did, and after weighing them in his hand, threw them on the table again and again : balanced them carefully, sounded them, then passed them over to the Count.

They threw evenly for a little time, winning, or losing, as the chances of the game told for, or against them. Baxter's eyes intently fastened on the dice, while the Count's companion edged himself almost to the elbow of his friend, and stood leaning over his chair, to all appearance interested only in the play, until Baxter told him "to sheer off, as his countrymen always did at sea, and not come the old game of two to one. If he did not like it, he could say so, and take it out in the morning."

The Count either did not, or would not understand him. He shrugged his shoulders, pressed even closer than he had done before ; then did as Baxter had requested, and stood a little further off.

The stakes were higher now than ever. The man in the cap had won the last throw, and eager to take advantage of the sudden turn of luck in his favour, offered a hundred guineas on the next cast. It was lost ! Again and again

he staked, yet still the dice fell sixes, and always to the Count.

Snatching up the dice as they fell clattering on the table, the foreign-looking man placed them carefully in the box, rattled it gently, and cried, "Two hundred guineas."

The Count nodded, and the dice fell down.

He threw sixes himself this time. But the Count threw sixes too! When tearing open his coat to get at his pocket-book, the man placed it between them on the table, and risked the whole of its contents upon the next cast. His face had grown of an unearthly paleness; his cap had slipped a little on one side, and the black string fastening his false beard, was seen passing over his head.

All eyes were now bent upon the table; the lookers-on crowding and pressing forward to see the dice fall down. Baxter forced himself forward too, leaving the other Count to resume his old place by his friend's side.

The man in the cap threw first—quatre, cinq. He almost trembled when the other rattled the deadly box, while the noise it made turned him faint and sick. At last the dice were thrown. He fell back in his chair, while the Count cleared the table of pocket-book, notes, and all. And

then, without moving a muscle, or even changing colour, emptied the pocket-book, folded the notes, placed them in his breast ; and leaning over the table, handed the empty case with a low bow to Captain Nicholas Upton.

One by one, players and lookers-on, all left the apartment, while the bright sun streaming through the cracks of the closed shutters, glanced upon the table like a fiery beam, while guttered candles, spluttering from the wicks, struggled with the glow of early day, tinting the room up with unnatural light.

Upton still sat. His back turned towards the window ; and as the candles threw out their flickering gleam, his pale, ghastly face looked death-like, as he stooped forward, staring with his bloodshot eyes at the dice still lying upon the table.

Bridgeman was fast asleep, snoring in his chair—an empty wine-glass clasped in his hand, while the exhausted bowl stood sideways on the table, as though it had been tilted up, to drain its very dregs. When Baxter, who had remained to watch his friend, roused him up ; then passing on to Upton, put his hand upon his shoulder, as if to rouse him too.

Upton started at the touch, as though a snake

had stung him. Then looking vacantly about the room, sank back into his chair with a heavy sigh.

"How much have you lost, Nic?" asked Baxter, almost in a whisper.

"Five thousand pounds; every penny of it!"

"It's a bad job, but can't be helped. So put on your cap, and let's be off."

Upton settled it on his head, and rising from his chair, staggered across the apartment to where Bridgeman sat yawning and stretching on his seat, from which Baxter pulled him, with an oath, and was leading the way out of the house, when Upton stopped him by saying—

"Not that way! Here, down the back stairs. I know the ins and outs better than you do. I can't afford to be stared at, whatever you can, Jack."

"Five thousand pounds!" half muttered Baxter to himself, following on the heels of Upton, who led them on, down a dimly-lighted flight of stairs, conducting them into a court, at the back of the house. "Five thousand pounds!"

"It's a tidy loss for one night," said Upton; "almost as good a windfall as you have had lately."

"How do you mean?" asked Baxter, with a stare.

“Oh! nothing; only keep away from those Bow Street gentlemen, that’s all. There are a dozen men would know you, if they have eyes to read the newspapers with, and if a reward once comes out, keep yours wide open, and your legs ready for a run, that’s all; and what’s more, don’t put temptation in the way of the hangers on about this place. I saw one of the waiters looking at you just now as though he had half a mind to turn thief-taker himself. It is the last night I shall give them; but there was time enough for me, until now, and now not a minute later.”

“What’s up, Nic?”

“Oh! nothing but what you may hear of, or read of, if you are as fond of newspapers as I am. Mind how you go down-stairs, or Master Tom here will break his neck, and be doing an injustice to those attentive people who are paid for the work. Why, he’s as drunk as a bear! I thought claret was too gentlemanly a drink to make a beast of a man in this way.”

“Claret be——” a hiccup prevented the completion of the sentence. “Punch is the only thing, if you want to keep your legs steady.”

Bridgeman nearly tumbled as he spoke, but his two companions held him up, and passing

through a concealed door, emerged into an out of the way passage, leading them through almost impossible turnings, until they saw a hackney coach crawling along the street, and the driver nearly as drunk as Bridgeman.

“Hallo! Jarvey!” shouted Baxter.

The man drew up at the call in as straight a line as he could make up his mind to, while the two men, lifting Bridgeman inside, told the man to drive to the corner of Tottenham Court Road.

“All right, your honour.” And away went Jarvey, slashing at his jaded horse’s flanks, full pelt for the City, when Baxter thrust his head out of the window, and with a curse, made him turn round. So Jarvey slashed his horses back again in the opposite direction. He had no very distinct idea where he was going, but tugging first at one rein, then the other, with a slash of his whip at every tug, he landed them safely at last, at the corner of the Oxford Road.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BABY'S CLOTHES.

ON a wretched mattress, in a still more wretched garret, in the worst quarter in St. Giles's, lay a mother and her child. The mother was a young, sickly thing, while the poor infant nestling at her breast, looked pale and sickly, too. The wan cheeks of that young mother were shrunk and bloodless, and her sunken eyes were dim. Yet still the infant fought and struggled, to obtain the nourishment it hungered for, but could not get; sickness, and many wants, had dried the founts of nature up, and the poor, puling child, grew weak and weaker every day; while the mother lay consumed with fever and unconsciousness half the time—she felt the infant struggling at her at times, and with her trembling hand held its pinched up mouth to what it craved for, but could not obtain.

She had lain thus for days, and had wanted food and nourishment for weeks, and might have died right off, starved in the midst of plenty in that bare, dismal attic, but for the aid of one, almost as

poor and needy as herself. For, the woman of the house had little feeling for her, and never looked into the room, without telling her how many weeks' rent she owed, and how her good man would turn her out some night, if she didn't find money to pay it with.

A workhouse shell would have been the readiest means, and in a little while both mother and child might be laid in it, and the few scraps of clothes, not used to wrap her in, would help to pay the rent. The woman had already looked at these, and counted them with a greedy, calculating hand. They were a mere parcel of odds and ends, laid on a rickety chair, but the child's clothes were better, and might fetch something.

At such times the sick girl would look at her, for she had not strength to speak, or with her thin, bony hand, pointed to her child, in mute petitioning, to its wants, and her own sad lot. But the woman did not care for that, or what that want or need might be; she wanted her rent, and had no sympathy, no feeling, beyond her weekly reckoning, and that was not paid. She could get more gin with that, fight and quarrel in the streets, or lie in drunken stupor half the day.

The parched and cracking lips of the sick

girl were parted, although no sound came from them ; but the whispered prayer was heard aloft, and God *did* pity and protect her in her sorrow.

For months and months Nelly had struggled on, in direst need, working long hours, to obtain the barest necessities of life. The work she obtained was from poor neighbours, who could not afford to pay her much, and sometimes all her toil was thrown away, and she was not paid even the pittance she had bargained for. But when the spring came on, and the hard winter time was passed, she suffered less, and got some slop work to do. This she was paid regularly for, and by dint of working all the day, and sitting up half the night, she contrived to save a few odd shillings, almost starving herself meanwhile, to buy the clothes she knew she should soon require. But as her situation became more evident, the man, who had ground her down in price at first, ground down still more, and said "he did not know whether he was right in giving such as her a help, when virtuous and well conducted girls did the work quite as well, and charged no more. If the people heard of it at chapel, he should be told of it next Sunday, and the congregation would turn their backs on him." But as Nelly consented to

work for even less than the starving price he offered, his scruples gave way, and the devout Mr. Gobbins saw her waste and pine away, with a feeling of strong approval of the inward chastening she was undergoing for her fault.

By frequently going to the shop to carry home her work, she came to know and chat with a girl, who, like herself, worked slop work, and was glad to earn her bread, although without even a scraping of butter on it, to give it a relish; but the girl had not the weight of grief upon her mind that Nelly had, nor the coming responsibility that must fall on her to drag her back. In the midst of her own sorrows, Nelly was glad to see her look so plump and rosy still, upon such humble fare as fell to her lot; but Polly Priggles was a careless, good-for-nothing sort of girl, who liked to laugh, and have her bit of harmless fun out of her twopence-halfpenny a week savings, and made as much show with it as other girls would out of a shilling. There was an off-hand manner about her, and a sort of devil-me-care air in all she did, that made her quite a character in her way, and one who did not mind saying what she thought, even to Mr. Gobbins himself; and one day even went so far as to slap his face, when he tried to give her a kiss, and said he

would give her more money than any of the other girls, if she'd only let him. But this did not suit Polly's "book," as she called it; she had a young man of her own, if ever the time should come when they could afford to buy a rasher of bacon between them for dinner, and be married on the strength of it.

Polly was off-hand with Nelly, too, when she saw her first, and rather turned up her nose at her; an unnecessary elevation of that particular organ, seeing Polly's nose had a certain degree of perpendicularity about it already, not likely to be improved by any extra forcing towards her eyebrows; but as Nelly took it patiently, and did not fly out in a passion, as some girls would have done, Polly "cottoned" to her, as she said, and bore her up a bit, when she was down-hearted. *She* did not know what down-hearted meant—not she; and with twopence-halfpenny a week to spend on a Sunday, did not mean to find it out.

Of course Polly had eyes in her head, the same as Mr. Gobbins had, and could see as far as most girls with only half of one, if it came to that. She saw at a glance how the world fared with Nelly, and how she was like to fare in a little time, with a child to keep, and not enough even for herself to hold body and soul together. Other peo-

ple seemed to know it too, and at the end of another month poor Nelly was turned out of the room where she had lived and worked since she first came to London, and had to seek another somewhere else, while the good neighbours said, "Mrs. Duns was right; the likes o' her had no calling to come into a decent street, and bring scandal on it, out of the lawful way, more especially as she had no money to stand treat with now and then, which, taking her situation into account, was only a proper consideration towards them as knowed what she was." Even the women who had at first been taken by her pretty country face, began to toss their mob-caps at her when she went along with her daily work, or asked them to give her some, while the women who had never paid her for her work at all, called her a "good-for-nothing hussy, and not fit to make gownds for decent women, which they was, and not another stitch should she have of them, nor a penny of what they owed, if she took them before the Lord Mayor for it, so that she might make her mind up to at once."

There was but one woman of them all who had shown any heart or feeling for her, and that woman Nelly had always shunned, for there was a hard, stony expression about her face; her eyes

wandered at times, and she would sit upon her door-step, looking on the ground by the hour together, as though it shut up something she would wish to see, if she could only get at it. The neighbours did not quite know what to make of her themselves, and when she sat moping in that way, said "perhaps she had murdered some one, and could not help looking at the spot where she had buried him." How she lived, no one knew; but live she did, and once in every three months got drunk, regularly as quarter-day came.

Her room was always tidy enough, though poorly furnished, and the fair neighbours often looked in at the window to know what she was doing. Perhaps she was employed by an undertaker, and was ashamed of the work she had to do—making those horrid things; or perhaps she kept the four bottles ready filled, to meet the quarter-days as they came about, and *might* ask them in to look at them—that was all. But she never did—and to their certain knowledge, no one had ever put a foot inside her place, except the "chimbley-sweeper," as sure as ever their dancing days were over.

One night, when Nelly was near her time, and Mr. Gobbins had given her a heavy load of the hardest work at the cheapest possible price, she saw

this woman standing at her window. The woman looked at her as she passed. Nelly returned the glance. The woman seemed as though she had been watching for her, and beckoned to her with her finger. Nelly stopped. The woman beckoned her again. Her room was on the ground-floor, fronting the street, and as she went to open the door, Nelly stepped in at the always open entry, and saw the woman waiting for her. She beckoned her inside, and, going to a chest of drawers, unlocked and pulled one out, then taking a small parcel from it, locked it up again, and placing the package in Nelly's hands, patted her on the head, and put her out of the room again, without a word.

Nelly was half-frightened at the strange manner of the woman ; yet, eager to know what the parcel contained, hastened to her attic, and looked at the contents with curious and delighted eyes. There were some sets of baby's clothes, all clean and neatly folded up, with a sprig of faded lavender lying between each piece of clothing. The clothes themselves were of superior materials, worked by a careful hand, embroidered and edged with lace. She ran to thank the woman for her kindness, but her window was shut up, and though she knocked and knocked at her room door, it was not opened. She never saw her from that day, but

she blessed her in her heart for the gift she had given her. Her baby would be well clothed at all events; and the little garments lay close by the side of the mattress, when the landlady took them up, calculating how far they would go to pay the rent, and if there would be a surplus left for gin.

The poor girl looked at her as she took them up, watching her with her glazed eyes, and saw her put them down again in the same fashion as they had lain. The glimmer of a guttered rushlight fell on the woman all the time, and she could not steal them with Nelly's eyes staring at her in the way they did. The child gave a small cry, and as the poor mother turned to hush it, the baby's clothes were tumbled off the chair; and there the woman huddled over them, just as the door opened, and in bustled Polly Priggles.

The woman bustled up as well, and let something fall from her. Nelly had fainted dead away, and there the rushlight guttered, with a pin stuck through its middle to keep it straight.

Polly was a girl of the world, and knew what it was made of better than the wisest teachers who talk so much about it, and do little else *but* talk about it. She saw at a glance how matters stood, but knew it was no good to quarrel at a time like this. The woman would kill Nelly by

her noise and bullying when no one was by; for she had no one there to watch and care for her—no one but Polly, and she had daily work to do; but at night she came to sit by her, and sat working on her tumble-down chair until she went nodding off, balancing herself on the only three sound legs it had left, dreaming of impossible rashers and young Ned Knackers.

“Here you are, Mrs. Waterings, as usual—always a doing good to some one, and not your rent paid yet, and six shillings owing. Never was such a woman as you are, and so tender-hearted—a cherry is a fool to you! They may call its inside a stone, if they will; but, bless you, Mrs. Waterings knows better—she judges by her own. See what a splendid kernel there is in the middle of it; only you must crack your teeth to come at it—mustn’t you, Mrs. Waterings?”

Mrs. Waterings did not quite approve of the comparison; but the baby’s clothes were still scattered on the floor, and Polly had her eyes fastened on them, and on her too.

“It’s not me, you see, as wants to turn her out; but rent’s rent, and my master says she must pack. Let her try the parish next time, and not come to decent people’s places with her left-hand brats.”

“And baby’s clothes,” said Polly, picking them up, counting them one by one, and putting them in their old place on the chair. “But, as you says, Mrs. Waterings, rent is rent; and those *good men* are such brutes, and have no more feelings than the cherry-stones we were talking of. There’s no kernels in *them*—is there, Mrs. Waterings?”

“You had better ask,” said Mrs. Waterings, rather nettled.

“How much the rent is?” went on the unmoved Polly. “Four weeks, at one and six, is six shillings. There’s your money, Mrs. Waterings; and the baby’s clothes, I hope, is safe, and not to have the broker seize upon them, with two-and-six per day all the time he is in possession of the little darling’s under-clothing—wittles not included, unless he buys them himself.”

Mrs. Waterings pounced upon the money, and thought a shilling of it might fairly go to the consolation of herself and Mrs. Howlet, who was her next-door neighbour on the second floor back, and always shared a treat with her even if they fought like a couple of wild cats afterwards.

“I see what you are thinking of, Mrs. Waterings—the good man below. Don’t keep him waiting for such a treasure as you are, especially

now you see the baby's clothes is safe. There's only one thing I wish to impress upon your mind, while it is in a fit state to receive impressions; the shillings is good—so don't bring 'em back from the gin-shop and say they are bad. You couldn't bite a bit out of them if you tried, and your teeth was good—which they ain't. Good-bye, you darling woman; and the next time I want you, I'll send for you."

Mrs. Waterings was divided between gin and bullying; but gin got the better of her, as it generally did, and, gripping the shillings in her hand, she went below, to share her consolation with the next door second floor back.

Poor Nelly lay in a swoon all the time, and Polly had not even known it. She had been so much in the habit of finding her silent, weak, and sinking from the fever that had fallen upon her soon after her child was born, it was not until Mrs. Waterings had bumped her way down stairs, she went to her miserable bed-side, saw her upturned face, and noticed how pale it was. She almost screamed when she laid her hand upon it, and felt how cold and clammy it was, thinking the poor girl was dead! dead with the child hanging at her breast.

Nelly gave a sigh at last—a long-drawn,

aching sigh, and glanced towards her baby's clothes. Polly was hanging over her ; she thought it was the woman who had come to murder her, and almost fainted off again, until Polly called to her, poured some soothing drink she had in a bottle, between her dry, colourless lips, and by slow degrees brought her round again.

Throughout that live-long night Polly watched by her, gave the nourishment she had brought with her, and told her how a good lady she had met with was having jellies made for her, and nice things for her to take, and how a doctor would be there in the morning—not a parish doctor, who would merely pop his head into the room and walk out again, as if afraid of catching cold, as some of those fellows did—but a real, gold-headed cane doctor, who rode in his own carriage, and would frighten the street—that had no thoroughfare—out of its wits, and send the people into convulsions when he came to see her in the morning, rattling over the greasy, unswept stones of that St. Giles's street.

Nelly looked at her with surprise, but had no strength to make known her gratitude, excepting by a feeble smile, that lit her pale face up for a brief moment, then died away again. But Polly had her tale to tell, and told it right off, as was

her custom, to the half unconscious Nelly, while she bathed her temples, and tried a thousand well-known recipes to keep her up, and cheer her drooping spirits—patting her hand, playing with her hair, or fondling her baby.

Polly had a whole bagful of news, and tumbled it out in a heap—never even waiting to pick out the best bits and tell them first. She had a medley of ill news, good news, bad news, capital news, all jumbled and huddled together in an impossible heap. Old Gobbins had tried to kiss her again, and when she smacked his face—a rare smack it was, she could tell her; her fingers tingled still at the thought of it—but, as that was good news, she did not care about it. But then the pious man had cut her down in price in consequence, and her twopence-halfpenny a week was in jeopardy—that was bad news. But then Ned had got a place as light porter, and had to carry a heavy knot upon his shoulders, with awful packages on the top of it, somewhere in the Borough—that was good news again. But Ned was a little weak in his legs, and thought he could not stand the work—bad news again! And so from bad to good she went on without stopping, while Nelly's staring eyes looked at her, without even guessing what she was talking about.

But Polly's good and bad news were not done yet; and, making Nelly take another drink of the nice stuff she kept holding in a cracked tea-cup, she went on like a lamplighter, and never stopped until she had told her how, passing down Fleet Street on her way to old Gobbins, the very morning of all when he tried to kiss her, and she had smacked his face—the old saint of a squinting ruffian! that Ned would strangle right off, if he only knew it; for though Ned was weak on his legs, he was awful strong in his arms—she saw a lady step out of her coach, and her purse drop on the pavement at the same time. Polly's foot was almost on it! The coachman was staring right before him at a man balancing knives on the tip of his nose; the lady had gone into the shop, and no one saw her pick it up. It was full of money—full as a pincushion of pins—and there it laid like a heavy lump in her hand! A horrid longing came over her to slip it up her sleeve, and walk on as demurely, and looking almost as saintly, as Mr. Gobbins would have done. The lady was sitting quietly in the shop, and Polly!—it was of no use, twopence-halfpenny, or no twopence-halfpenny a-week—in she walked, and handed her the purse.

The lady stared, felt in her pocket, and, sure

enough, discovered she had lost her purse. She whipped a couple of beautiful new guineas out, as easily as Polly could whip a needle through a button-hole, but Polly's pride, like her nose, was rather of a stuck-up character, and she said, "No, thank ye, ma'am," with the air of a duchess. The old lady shook her fan at her, and said she *should* take them. Polly, who was not to be contradicted on her own dunghill, said she "*shouldn't*," point blank, and was walking out of the shop when she thought of Nelly's rent, and went back again, though not without trying how far she could raise her nose when she looked at the shopmen, who did nothing else but stare at her, and said, "If you please, ma'am, I can't take the two guineas, but if you'll make it six——"

"I don't grudge them in the least," said the old lady, who slid open her purse, and began counting, "Four, five, six——"

"Shillings!" said Polly, "and I won't take a penny more, even if Ned was to lose his place, and old Gobbins said his prayers back'ards. But a friend of mine, as can't help herself just now, 'cos she's too ill to do anything but faint away, owes that sum exactly, and her baby's clothes will be seized by the broker, and herself turned into the streets, all along of six shillings to pay her rent."

The old lady raised her eyes, Polly wiped hers, and the end of it all was—and this was the best news after all—the old lady made her promise to call on her that afternoon, at her house in one of those awful-looking squares at the West End, heard all Nelly's story—as much as Polly knew of it at least—and began crying almost as much as Polly herself who told it.

Out came the six shillings, and off went a servant with a note to the family doctor. The cook was set to work making calf's-foot jelly, and comfortable drinks. The footman had had notice to quit, because he was always getting drunk, and could not walk upstairs without breaking the glasses; and if Ned's legs were only strong enough to carry up dinner, and the big tea-urn, without smashing it, he was to take his place. Polly was to do all the spare needlework of the house; and when Nelly got well, who knew but she might be lady's-maid—with the baby out at nurse, of course—with the big square all to herself to look at, out of the attic windows, all day long.

The drunken footman opened the door with a bang, savage at being disturbed from his morning's drink, to open the door for the young woman, and looked at Polly as though he would have swallowed her right off, only Polly's nose was more elevated

than ever just then, and if it had happened to have gone the wrong way, would have stuck like a hook in his throat, and prevented the possibility of swallowing. With a tremendous toss of her little head, she flounced out of the house, walked like Mrs. Pritchard, in "Lady Macbeth," down the steps, slowly and sternly, but once round the corner of the awful square, she bolted off with all the legs she had to the Borough, to tell Ned to be there the next morning at ten o'clock—without his heavy knot, of course; then off again to comfort Nelly, and pay her rent, the six shillings almost melting in her hands with heat and perspiration, and climbed up to her room door just as Mrs. Waterings had tumbled down the baby's things, with a view of picking some of them up, and Nelly had fainted, without her even knowing it.

The poor girl's staring, open eyes were closed at last. For nights they had been without a wink, and sleepless as though they had never meant to close their lids again. But they drooped now, and her deep-drawn breath came evenly and gently. An unusual comfort had come upon her from the sight of Polly's face, even more than her words—for they were almost past her comprehension—and sinking into repose, that youthful mother slept calmly and well.

Nelly's eyes were closed at last. The careful Polly took the child away, nursing and rocking it all the while, until the little thing slept as well. It was the first sleep Nelly had had for nights and nights. The small quantity of nourishment she had taken had soothed her into slumber, and in her quiet dream she saw once more the cottage in the Quell, and her father weeding in the garden.

The dingy street was more than startled, the dwellers in its dark and fetid rooms were positively aghast, when the next morning a coach drove along as though it were out of its senses, and stopping at Mrs. Waterings' always open door, a middle-aged gentleman, with full powdered hair and a gold-headed cane in his hand, stepped out, walked inside the dingy passage, upstairs to the room of the girl who had never paid her rent.

There was no end to surmises, no limit to their guessing, as trooping round the door, or hanging out of windows, a hundred or more of the fair inhabitants of that favoured locality held their secret parley. She was a lord's daughter after all, who had run away with the footman, and the family plate at the same time, and the footman had afterwards deserted her, and left her and her dear little

child to starve ! The mystery of the baby's clothes was now developed, and was as plain a fact as the six shillings had been the overnight, from the effects of one of which, Mrs. Waterings was not yet quite recovered ; for her next door second floor back had had her treat all by herself, and was incapable of walking for more, so Mrs. Waterings had drunk her shilling's worth to herself, and almost wished she hadn't, for though sixpen'orth did her good, a shilling's worth was a dose, and made her qualmish the next day, and not disposed to get out of bed too soon, but as Mr. Waterings had given her a black eye the overnight, it was perhaps as well as it was.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN IN THE CAP.

THE doctor had come just in time. In less than four-and-twenty hours that youthful mother and that ailing child would have passed to their long rest, and Mrs. Waterings could have paid herself a fresh week's rent out of the poor child's finery, and have got drunk on the remainder.

There was an overtaxed mind and failing body to contend against; but with the body's strength the mind might be refreshed, and a more healthy influence be extended to it; so the child was ordered away from the sinking woman's breast, and fed with milk more nourishing than the poor girl could give it. She cried to have her child at first; but Polly was obstinate, and obeyed the doctor as a dial does the sun. The half-starved child took kindly to its food; poor Nelly slept and rested better now, than with the craving infant always fighting by her side. The doctor's medicines lulled her fever down, and the cool drinks he ordered took off the

burning thirst that had preyed upon her day and night. All things were better now, and if she had only strength to rally, her life would be spared, and tender-hearted Polly be a happy girl after all.

Nelly sat in her bed at last, propped up by pillows sent from the good old lady's house. *She* was not afraid of fever, nor afraid to face it when good was to be done; and when the poor girl could be moved, a room was taken for her at Camden Town, where Polly brought her work from the great square, and sat working by her, feeding the baby, talking of unheard-of shillings saved per week, and even cocked her nose up at the thought of bygone twopence-half-pennies. Ned carried up the dinner like the side of a house, and though he was a little knock-kneed, looked amazing in his yellow plush and tiger-headed buttons. His knot had been left for the next new candidate for the honours of light portership, and the big square now called Ned its own.

Polly had as much work as she could do, and unless she took the housemaid's place, and became Mrs. Knackers on the strength of the first quarter's wages, Nelly could always help her on with it, and make twice as much as Mr. Gobbins's

slop-work paid her; her flesh was stealing on her poor arms again, and in a little time she would be able to leave her chair to take care of itself, and get about as she used to do.

The green fields she was so near to, and the clean, though humble room she lived in, all tended to her health. Her child grew stronger too—that gave strength to her; she saw its eyes grow brighter and bluer every day. The pinched-up mouth had now become a bow of coral, through which the early buds of teeth would soon come peeping forth. The sad mother's heart began to beat again with youthful hope, to see that child like *him* about the eyes, but not like him, she hoped, to be so heartless.

The summer days were on them now, and basking in the early sun the tender girl drew in fresh life with every day she lived. The green of those wide fields called back the recollection of the meadows round about Chase House, and although it made her melancholy at times, her early childhood was before her in the scenes she saw; and she could deck her own young child with yellow cups and daisies, as her mother had decked her, and hold it crowing up, half-smothered in a crown of white and yellow.

There was a little dash thrown on this joy

when Polly came one day, dressed out in a new cap and ribbons, and brought the knock-kneed Ned upon her arm. Her missus had given her leave; she was housemaid now, and Ned and she were going to be married. She had kept it a secret up till now; but they had been asked three times, and to-day, of all days, she was to be Mrs. Knackers, for better or worse.

Ned's knees almost trembled under him when he called to mind the honours of that day, put his long big arm about Polly's waist, and gave her—spite of a little proper shyness before company—a kiss, Mr. Gobbins would have sold his share in his Chapel for only twice as much as it was worth, for a chance of getting. Polly's nose was made for kissing; it never stood in the way, as other noses did, but slanted upwards, as though determined not to interfere with what the lips thought proper to do; but whether they liked it or no, Ned kissed them manfully, and bidding Nelly good-bye, walked off with his place-getting little woman to be married.

Nelly was rather sad that day, but towards night she began to rouse herself, and think how she had best begin to get her daily bread, and find food and shelter for her child. The good

old lady had assisted her during her illness, and sent many things to ease her wants; but when her story became known and her health grew better, the old lady drew back a little, and though she never let her want while there was good to be done for her or her child, the sensitive heart of Nelly felt there *was* a change, even before the change had come. The old lady had paid her rent at first, and gave her money to assist her on, but she never came herself now; and when the poor girl questioned Polly as to the cause, she twitched her nose, gave it a good rub, and began talking of something else. Nelly had guessed it for some time, and burst out crying, for fear of what the good, kind lady should think of her, now she knew all about her.

She longed to fall upon her knees before her, to tell her her story, and beg that gentle woman's pity and forgiveness; and yet she felt she would have run a hundred miles away rather than face her, after all the kind and merciful things she had done for her—for her, who had been guilty of what she had been, and brought a touch of shame even upon the bounteous hand that fed and cherished her. She knew what she felt in her heart towards that noble woman, and her

goodness, she knew, would meet its own reward hereafter.

Her fast friend, Polly, was going to be married; she could not expect to have her always by her now, nor could she get away from her new service, except on holidays. She felt she must begin to think for herself, and trust to herself.

Walking along the road leading to the cottage where she lived, she sank her head, and thought of starving want, of Mr. Gobbins, and his slopwork, hardly paying for the needles and thread she used, and the rushlight she worked by. Her child was sleeping in her arms, and looking in its tender face her heart felt bursting, while her tears began to fall, thinking what she should do, to keep that child from want as well. She could be content to starve herself; but to see that child waste and pine away, as she had seen it waste and pine, in that dreadful attic, almost drove her mad.

A girl came singing by the roadside, with a basket of flowers on her head, and asked her to buy a bunch. Nelly shook her head, and said "she could not afford to buy flowers." Poor girl! she was thinking of bread, not flowers.

The girl put her basket by the wayside, and

said she'd give her one for nothing then—"not one of the best of course, but a small sprig for the child."

Nelly's eyes filled up, when, having placed the small bunch of flowers in the clasped hand of the sleeping babe, the girl took up the basket, and went singing off again.

Nelly called after her, and when the girl returned, asked her "where she got her flowers from."

"From market, to be sure. You don't think I steals 'em?"

"And can you sell them?"

"Of course: I can't afford to give 'em," replied the girl.

"I mean," said Nelly, "can you live by selling them?"

"Well, I makes a shift on't," answered the girl. "It's not roast beef and plum-pudding work, but it's bread and cheese, and that's something."

Nelly thought so too, and began thinking if she went without the cheese, she might perhaps get something better for her child.

"Could you put me in a way of selling them?" asked Nelly.

"Easy, if you don't come on my walk. I have

been here these two years, and don't want no opposition."

"But if I sold my flowers somewhere else?"

"It's a good time of year for them just now, but in winter I cries watercresses, matches, or anything I can get."

"Where do you go to market?" inquired Nelly.

"To Covent Garden; gets there about four o'clock in the morning, buys what I wants, and toddles about till they're all gone; or if I have good luck and sells 'em right off early, I gets some more, and tries to sell them too."

"But who do you buy of?"

"Of the people as brings 'em to sell. You might know that with half an eye, without asking. You get a basket and come along o' me some morning, I'll show you how; only mind, no tricks on my walk, or I'll scratch your eyes out."

"I should be too thankful to you for putting me in a way of getting my bread, to try to take yours away."

"Well, if your mind's made up to it, and you have got money to buy a basket, you be there at four o'clock, and I'll show you a place; they keep 'em all ready there, flowers and all, but sometimes when they asks more money than they are worth

—they'll cheat you if they can, mind that,—I goes to the nursery grounds and makes a bargain. I bought these over there just now," the girl said, pointing to a nursery ground some little distance off. "I made a matter of two shillings this morning, though I can't always count on luck like that; but with good flowers you are pretty sure to sell, that is, if you knows what flowers is."

"I have been used to flowers all my life," said Nelly, with a sigh; "have planted them, and grown them, and gathered lapfuls to make garlands with."

"Then you won't stand a chance of being cheated like some of the girls is, who don't know a peony from a daffydowndilly. But mind you keep out of their walks, or they'll half murder you; and by your looks, you ain't over-strong to fight."

"If I come there to-morrow, will you stand my friend, and put me in the way to it? And if you'll only tell me where to go, I'll keep out of all your ways."

"It's a pretty long pull to toddle all the way up there." The girl's eyes glanced at the child, as she said, "Is that your baby? or are you a nussin' it for some one else?"

Nelly did not answer, but her tears fell on the child's face and woke it up.

The girl looked at her for a minute without speaking, then taking a bright flower from a bunch, held it in the child's eyes. The first small bunch had fallen out of its hand when it woke, so she picked that up as well and flashed them in the little infant's face.

"Four o'clock to-morrow, mind," said the girl, "and what's more, I'll take care they doesn't cheat you. I shall know you if you don't know me. But mind the money for the basket and the flowers though."

The girl put her basket upon her head, and went off crying her nosegays on from door to door, and left Nelly standing in the road, counting up the few shillings she had saved from the good lady's bounty. The girl turned and looked at her three or four times, then waved her hand at last in friendly good-bye to her and her child.

The next day was wet, and Nelly did not dare to venture out, but the morning following she left her child to the kind keeping of the woman of the cottage, and having kissed its little sleeping lids until she almost woke it, set off with the first peep of morning on her way to Covent Garden Market to buy her basket and flowers.

No merchant trusting to the seas his treasured wealth, ever watched the wind, or longed for news of that ship's safety, within whose floating ribs was ventured all his store, more earnestly than that poor girl now dwelt upon the risk she ran, hazarding on so much wicker work and fading flowers, the few shillings she had scraped and scraped together ; saved by daily pinching of herself ; and now they were all to go ! The merchant might freight another ship, if the first went down, to bring back spicy treasures from the East, and double all his former losses by the gain it made. But Nelly's all was clasped in her small thin palm, and that once scattered, where should she obtain a fresh supply to venture as the merchant could, or try the seas again ?

She was still weak, and had only half recovered her failing strength ; but she went, armed with strong hope to aid her, walking along, although with shaking knees, to Covent Garden ; the early morning tinting the streets with a gray pale light which, as she went, melted and faded off before the slanting rays of the red sun, shining like reflected fire upon the window panes, and on the tall house tops. She had to rest herself at times, leaning on posts at the corners of the streets,

still thinking of the shillings in her hand, and of the risk she ran in parting with them.

There were early passers on the road beside herself. Women with baskets on their heads, and men and boys with donkeys carrying their empty panniers, to be filled with fruit and vegetables. Men, too, came clattering by in carts. Butchers with their fast-going nags, passing still further on to Newgate or Leadenhall, and other carts again to Billingsgate. All were astir, each one crowding to fill their shops and stalls, and have all ready by the time the sleeping denizens of the huge town should wake, and find all waiting for them.

The last stroke of the clock had hardly died away, when, with toiling steps, Nelly reached Covent Garden Market, and through a noisy, shouting crowd, went looking up and down to find the girl who was to help her. Men stood shouting from the tops of carts and waggon; huge piles of greens and cabbages went, and came, as if by magic, the heaped-up waggons shrunk down, while carts and barrows, panniers and trucks, went swaying off, packed to the very brim, upon their way again.

At last she came to where the flowers laid piled, and where men and women stood chaffering

over the fragrant heaps. There were girls with baskets on their heads, some filled and some yet waiting, picking here and there, to get their money's worth, and find the best and freshest. Nelly was bewildered, and almost wished she had not come so far, or brought her shillings in her hand on such a hopeless errand.

A girl was on her knees near where she was standing, packing her basket, and when she rose, Nelly thought she was like the same girl she had met. But there were so many girls and so many baskets she hardly knew which was which. The girl knew her though, and pointing to the flowers laid in rows and heavy bunches, told her, "They were the best all to nothing, and the cheapest too, if she was still of the same mind."

There was no time to hesitate, and before she well knew where she was, she found herself with a basket of flowers, like the girl had, walking side by side with her out of the busy market.

But there was yet some work to do. The flowers had to be picked and sorted, and then made into nosegays. The girl taught her how to do this, and how to make a pennyworth look like two; and when they were all tied up, and spread out in the best way to make a show,

told her where she might walk without meeting other girls, who, like rich crossing-sweepers, "warn't to be turned out of their property for nothin'."

She felt a little awkward at first, and almost trembled at asking the passers-by to buy of her; but when she had sold two or three bunches, she took heart and sat at the corners of the streets, tempting people as they walked, and at last managed to call out, "Nosegays, only a penny apiece!"

She was tired when she reached home at night, but her flowers were all sold, all but a pretty sprig she had saved to deck her baby with. She almost cried with pleasure when she clasped it in her arms again, and hugging it to her beating heart, prattled to it, and said she hoped she should be able to get it bread and milk at all events.

She counted up her money. She had still the same amount to a penny she had taken out in the morning; but her basket was paid for, and who knew but next day she should do as well, and have two shillings for her baby and herself.

The next day, and the next, the girl looked after her, until, with a little time, Nelly could

buy as well as she could; and her natural country taste, helped her to make her nosegays up smarter and prettier than any of the other girls. She had lighted on a good "walk," as they called it, and as she took care never to trespass on any of their "property," they had all a civil word for her, and her pretty, sickly face, made people stop and buy a nosegay, out of pity for her careworn look, and upon two occasions she had sixpence given her for a single bunch, when baby had a sponge cake, and quite a treat of it.

She had a chance of living now, however poorly; and the open air—although the streets were not like Blackdown, and she had no meadow paths to walk in—was better than working day and night for Mr. Gobbins, toiling and starving on, without reward or hope.

Mrs. Knackers was delighted at the change that had come upon her friend. For though Polly was Mrs. Knackers now, it did not make a bit of difference; "not a ha'p'orth," as she said, and with great difficulty was she prevailed upon to take a nosegay home for Mr. Knackers, and a bunch of the best and sweetest Nelly could pick from the whole lot, to place upon the good lady's table, in token of a poor girl's gratitude. Polly rubbed her nose, by way of cover to her eyes,

took the nosegay home, wrapped in a splendid cabbage leaf, put it in a little vase, and placed it on the old lady's work-table.

The next day Polly came down with an order; an order enough to sweep Covent Garden Market bare as a door mat—a whole five shillings' worth, to put upon the dinner table next day, and make it look like a flower bed. But Nelly did not make a penny out of that, it was all prime cost; and the next day Polly and Mr. Knackers bustled down after tea, as their missus was out, to show her how well Ned looked in his yellow plush, tiger headed buttons, and the awful square full upon him.

The old lady had sent her some work to do—she could do it when she liked, and how she liked, as she found time—and an extra five shillings for the trouble she had had with the flowers. The old lady had never had such a five shillings' worth before. So that, what with work for spare time, which she could do at odds and ends, or as she sat selling her flowers, and five shillings all in a lump, Nelly folded her baby in her arms, and slept buoyed up with hope, and richer than she had ever been, since the time she lost her guinea on the first night she arrived in London.

• She had been a week or so at her new trade, when coming home from market, she met two men in St. Martin's Lane. She thought she knew one of them; fancied she had seen him somewhere out with *him*; but the other was a stranger. The first man spoke to her, and gave her half-a-crown for a bunch of flowers. It was very kind of him; and he spoke gently to her, and would not let the drunken man lay hold of her. Where had she seen him? Somewhere down in her parts, and somewhere out with *him*.

She thought of him all day long, and even her flowers did not look so fresh as they had done, as she sat wondering where she had seen him, or on what occasion. Coming from market the next day, she met the men again; but they were put out by something, and passed without noticing her. The thick-set man just glanced at her, but that was all; the other was not so tipsy as he had been the morning before, and took no notice of her at all; but with his hands in his pockets, walked along, out of temper with himself, and everybody else. She stood looking after them, but they never turned to look at her, as they had done the time before.

A few days after that, she was on her way from Camden Town to buy her flowers, when going up

Tottenham Court Road, she saw three men step out of a hackney coach. One of them was dead drunk, while the other two were leading him. She knew the drunken man, and the man who was with him. He was the same who had given her the half-crown, in St. Martin's Lane; the other was a tall man, with a large beard, and a foreign looking cap on his head. She did not see his face, for he turned his head aside, and held his handkerchief to it, as she came along; but though she did not see his face, she thought she knew his figure, and he had a small cane in his hand, with which he kept striking at his boots, or hitting stray pieces off the pavement. She hardly dared to think who it could be. The man looked like a foreigner, yet she could have sworn to him, she thought, out of a million.

She stood still, and stared at them as they passed; she fancied they knew it too, by the way the two men spoke together, although neither of them looked back, but hurrying on upon their way, kept straight down Tottenham Court Road.

The whole of that day she did nothing else but think of him, and hardly noticed the passers by, or cried her nosegays. Their bloom was withered at the very thought of him, and with her mind far away, she sat thinking of the time

when he had come to her at the cottage, with his cold, cruel talk, and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

She was sitting at the corner of a street, where some people were talking of the news, and of some robbery that had taken place. She could not catch all they said, but she heard enough to know that five hundred pounds were offered for a foreign-looking man, in a cap and beard, whose description answered every way with the one she had seen the day before, and who had held his handkerchief up to his face.

The two next mornings she was out earlier than usual, and with her thoughts still bent on the man with the cap, let market time slip by, hanging about the corner of the road, watching for a hackney coach to stop again, and a drunken man to get out of it. But the coach never came, nor the three men, although she watched for them half-hid in door-ways, or concealed up narrow courts.

She had given up all thoughts of them, when, a week afterwards, she was walking with her basket of flowers on her head, and on the opposite side of the road, she saw Upton and the thick-set man pass along.

The Captain had no cap nor beard now. His

whole appearance was changed from what it had been, but Nelly knew him at a glance, and would have rushed across the street and seized upon him, so bitterly did she remember all his cruel scoff, his cold and brutal words. They did not see her, but passed some distance on. Nelly followed after them, determined to see where they went. She felt more confident than ever now, that Captain Upton and the man in the cap, were the same person for whom the reward was offered. She did not care for *that*—she had no thought of money in the burning sense of wrong she smarted under—but she would like to have seen him punished, and made to bear a portion of that misery he had heaped on her. She longed to know all about him, and if he ever saw *him*! Perhaps *she* might see him, too, if she could only find out where they lived, and dogging closely on their steps, she followed after.

They turned at last out of the road, looking about, to see if they were watched, when Nelly twisted on her heel, and pretended to be walking the contrary way; but no sooner had they moved into the side street, than she hastened after, and creeping round the corner, saw them go into John Street, and watching from behind the railings, saw them stop at a house with a green

door and a brass knocker, when opening it with a key, the two men went inside.

Hurrying past the house she observed it well, and on the opposite side saw a bill in a window of an attic to let. It was yet too early to inquire, she must go to market first; but that day, or the next, she would hire the attic, if she could; perhaps Martin might go to the house with the green door, and she should see him once again,—see him, and perhaps save him from his friend, Captain Nicholas Upton.

CHAPTER VI.

CROSS PURPOSES.

THE intelligence Mr. Pritchard carried to the Hall had the effect of sending Mr. Dormer to the sick bed again, from which he had been so recently removed. The shock of the present tidings acting on his weakened frame, brought on a nervous attack which finally resolved itself into paralysis on one side, and prostrated him so considerably, he had neither strength nor inclination to argue with the doctor when he was called in again; but let him have his way without uttering a word of opposition, or manifesting the slightest antagonism to his new fangled and most preposterous notions, on all matters curative or otherwise.

The news was even worse than Mr. Pritchard at first imagined. The arrival of the next mail brought intelligence of a general rising among the negroes, who had destroyed his client's plantations, taken armed possession of the island, and fire had completed the ruin of what the wasteful hand of man had failed wholly to accomplish.

These were all sad tidings for Mr. Dormer, and the serious loss he had sustained by the robbery from his agent distracted him, and sent him to his bed as weak and helpless as a child.

He wandered in his mind at times, and went rambling on, mixing the antique up with the modern in dire confusion, until Mr. Pritchard brought his strong common sense to bear upon the subject, as well as circumstances would permit, and during the brief stay he made at the Hall, kept his friend and client to the point at issue. But "time and tide," as he said, "waited for no man; he had other and important business to attend to in London, where he ought to be, looking after Mr. Dormer's interests, instead of playing sick nurse at his bed side, which any old woman in the place could do as well as he, perhaps better. If he were once in town," he continued, "he could expedite the affairs he had in hand, and urge the pursuit after the nefarious rogue who had cheated Mr. Dormer of his money, and with that constant pricking on, which even constables sometimes require, lead them on the right scent, and take the fellow, with the stolen notes and guineas in his possession. The best chance was in the heavy reward he had advertised, and no thief-taker of them all, but would

jump at such an offer, and use his utmost endeavours to get the man, and pocket the guineas, at the same time."

Florence, although cast down at first by this renewed attack upon her father's health, bore up bravely, and, prolific in womanly devices, cheered his drooping spirits, and urged him on to bear up bravely too: but his numbed side and powerless arm, reminded him too constantly of his failing state, and it required all the soothing influence of Florence and Mr. Stapleton to rouse him from his despondency.

Meanwhile Mr. Pritchard had returned to London, and they were in daily hopes of news from him that might cheer the old man up, and give him better hopes than they had hitherto dared to promise themselves.

But days and nights went by, and no news came. They were impatient, restless, yet tried to comfort themselves with the belief that "no news was good news." But there was no appeasing Mr. Dormer. He lost heart, and began to look on his affairs as desperate. There was no pleasing him, no winning him to look with the calm philosophy he was so fond of boasting of, at the true state of his affairs, and bide the shock of time. The resolution and the cou-

rage of the fine old days he used to talk of, had given place to whims and fretfulness, and this noble specimen of an ancient Saxon was as testy and peevish as the most modern, or ancient, sick man who ever lived.

There came a letter at last from Pritchard urging him to be of good heart and keep his spirits up, although he had no present tidings to communicate likely to act as a spell upon him. There was no further news from abroad, and although the officers were on the watch day and night, they had not yet been able to hunt up the foreign-looking gentleman who had honoured him by his admiration of his fine old English style of writing. "If," wrote Mr. Pritchard, "you had only written, my good sir, like any other common man of this barbarous eighteenth century, your five thousand pounds would be snug enough in your agent's hands to help you at a push like this. But if gentlemen will imagine themselves Walter Raleighs, and indite letters with all the obsolete absurdity of an impossible and barbarous age, they must not be surprised if some sharp witted fellow takes the trouble of finding it out, and profiting by it. But for all that, sharp as this one was, he hoped to run him down at last, and would spare no exertion to hand him over to

the tender mercies of the law." The lawyer wrote something after the fashion he spoken in, and went off rambling to impossible subjects. "He hoped," his letter continued, "Mr. Dormer would prove his belief in the stoicism of the olden time by his disregard of present misfortunes. Matters might settle themselves down again ; in the meantime the chief thing to do was to endeavour all he could to get his health re-established and leave him alone to look after his negroes abroad, and accomplished letter-writer at home."

But however active Mr. Pritchard might have been in his endeavours to trace the foreign-looking man who had enriched himself at the expense of his client, or in despatching letters abroad to protect his old friend's interests, they were easy tasks compared to the ceaseless fretting the watchers were subject to, through the unreasonable and contradictory desires of the poor patient, who made a point of wishing for everything he ought *not* to have, and expressed as powerful a disinclination to everything he *ought* to have ; but with such painstaking and gentle nurses as Florence and Mr. Stapleton, the old man, by degrees threw off his irritability, and seemed more inclined to listen to the tender schooling of his

child and nurse who had watched him through one illness, only to be the more devoted and self-sacrificing in the next.

The visits of Blakeborough had been less frequent of late, while his general demeanour was altered from what it had been. There was an uneasy, fretful look about him when he saw Mr. Dormer propped up in bed, as though the sight of the sick man's face had driven the colour from his own, and made him weak and trembling too. He felt it was through him a portion of the evil time had come, and that through him a blow had been struck which had helped to lay the good old man, who had relieved him from so much trouble, prostrate on his bed. He hardly dared to look at Florence, or meet her glance, fearing lest she should read the truth, and see the workings of his doubting thoughts, which crowded on him now, and almost drove him mad.

He had no heart to hang about the house, or watch, as he had often watched, the steps of Florence going in and out the room where he had sat with Mr. Dormer, humouring his fancies or helping him to ride his hobby, only for a sight of her. This was all over now. The old gentleman could no longer assist him in his suit, by calling Florence to sit and talk with them; his influence

was gone, and without it he was satisfied the small hold he had on his daughter's liking, would be forgotten in the ceaseless attentions the curate paid to her, whose personal suit he had no means of checking. Much as he regarded Florence, he felt he could more easily give her up, than add to the wrong he had already inflicted upon him, by any violence or antagonism on his part; and although he appeared to feel towards Miss Dormer the same affectionate regard as ever, a marked change had come upon him—a dull weighty care appeared to hang over him, and his only amusements consisted in reading, riding about the country, or taking long and solitary rambles.

From rambles such as these he would return with a dejected, heavy look, and even Lucas hardly dared to notice him as he sat staring at the same page of a book by the hour together, then laying down the volume walk about the room, or sit up late at night reading, or staring, still, Lucas did not know which; then go up to bed to walk again, and wake his faithful servant out of his sleep, to smell the smoke in his room, and fancy, for the hundredth time, he was going to be burnt in his bed.

He had the newspapers regularly from London, and day by day he would scan them through. There

was no news of Upton, nor of the men who had passed the stolen notes in St. Martin's Lane, but he had received a letter from Mr. Pritchard, giving him full particulars of the daily search after them, and how the thick-set man and another, had nearly been pounced upon in a lodging in May's Buildings. The woman of the house had heard her neighbours talking of two men—so like her lodgers she could not help thinking they must be the same—and she had said as much to the officers, but the men had quitted two hours before, and though the nest was warm, the birds had flown. Of the man with the cap and beard, nothing had yet been heard, but the reward was placarded far and near, and might bring my gentleman to the gallows yet, unless he had shipped himself abroad to spend the money he had swindled Mr. Dormer out of, like a thief and scoundrel as he was.

This news seemed to startle Blakeborough into something like action, and he resolved to go to London and learn from Mr. Pritchard's own lips how matters stood, what chance there was of finding the man he sought, and of discovering Nelly.

During his stay in London he walked about the streets day and night, threading his way

through the dark turnings of St. Giles's, asking repeated questions of women in the streets, and inquiring after her he sought at places by the water side, or at the doors of hospitals and poor-houses. His search was useless, and night by night he retraced his way moodily to his inn, only to return at last to Chase House, more gloomy and more abstracted than ever.

He had searched in vain, and Lucas had an uninterrupted and satisfactory listen at his door on the night of his return, as he went walking up and down, speaking aloud, as if to ease his mind from the weight it groaned under. There was not much got out of it, nothing Mr. Isaacs would care about hearing, even were he to sit up all night to write it—something about a child and a girl he was trying to find out, and could not; and something about a man in a cap, but he did not talk much of him, and only muttered to himself between his teeth when he did so.

And yet Blakeborough spoke of Nelly, in deep, earnest tones, wondering where the poor girl was, and what had been her lot. His conscience was busy with him, and he had thought of her through restless days and sleepless nights in useless guesses as to what had become of her. Had she been driven through want to a desperate

end, or if she still lived on, how had she passed through her time of trouble and distress? She, a poor helpless girl, without a friend to comfort or to aid, perhaps without the means of finding necessities! All this and more, was Upton's doing, he thought; and yet how willingly he had listened to his advice, and how cruelly the poor girl had been turned adrift in her hour of trial, through the selfish counsel of that man. He could tax himself now for having listened to that counsel, or being guided by it; and in his desire to atone the wrong he had done, almost appeared to forget how willingly he had sanctioned the suggestion for her removal, and how readily he had acted on it. It was only now, when in the solitude of his thoughts, dwelling on all she might have suffered through his fault, his conscience called him to a reckoning, and he had gone to London hoping to find her out, or learn some tidings as to her fate.

He felt he had enough to answer for; he thought less savagely of poor Dick Coombs now than he had done formerly, who had gone crazy for the loss of his child, and who had shot at him in the wooded glen, for having driven her away from him.

CHAPTER VII.

COMING EVENTS.

THE careful attendance of the doctor, added to the good constitution Mr. Dormer was fortunate enough in possessing, soon enabled him to throw his sickness off; and although his side was still numbed, and his arm useless, he recovered some portion of his former good spirits with his amended health, and was strong enough to hobble about his room, and grow argumentative again. He could play backgammon with one arm as well as with two, and could thumb his musty folios as well as ever; but they were not the books they used to be, and although he still clung to his old faith, and still asserted the merits of his hobby against any one who had the temerity to attack it, he was not quite so fond of talking of it, and even his old books were left to repose upon their shelves after a time, to grow more dim and musty every day.

The first shock of the bad news over, and a few anathemas bestowed on modern cheats and ill-

conducted governments, that ruin a man by their mismanagement of the colonies, he fell back upon his usual quiet way of living, and inexpensive habits. It was chiefly on Florence's account he took the matter so much to heart. She would not be so rich as she ought to have been, and might, after all, be able to aspire to no better match than a country curate. But Mr. Stapleton had won a soft corner in his heart by his constant and affectionate attention to him in his sickness, and although the old man saw clearly enough that love for his daughter prompted the attention, he was not the less pleased and won by it, and could hardly bear the place if Stapleton were not there to cheer him up, or read to him, whilst Florence worked at her tambour frame. She too, was always in better spirits when the curate was there, and would play upon her harpsichord, and sing his favourite songs twice as well as at any other time.

Thus, by degrees, affairs settled into a state of calm, as though a tacit agreement had been entered into by all parties interested, while Mr. Stapleton, who had despaired so recently, and had come prepared to renounce his hopes, grew all of a sudden as confident in his pretensions as he had before been doubting and uncertain ;

and although at times a pained and sorrowing look of self-reproach would steal across his face whenever his parents were alluded to, Florence and he appeared to have quite made up their minds, and as the old gentleman had begun to consider him as one of the family party, a notion appeared to have crept into all their heads that if Florence and the curate were only married, and lived at the Hall, the old gentleman would have them always at his elbow, ready upon all occasions to nurse him in his sickness, or humour him in his caprices. Sensible as he was of the precarious state of his health, he had too much affection for his child to wish to leave her without a protector—one who would pet and humour her, as she had always been humoured and indulged, since that kind old father had had the sole charge and guidance of her. That Mr. Stapleton would prove himself worthy of her he had no doubt ; he had lately had many opportunities of testing the affectionate regard which he entertained for her, and his constant watching of himself during his recent illness, had satisfied him as to his goodness of heart, and his consideration for the welfare of others. With such a man, Florence, he thought, could and would be happy ; and now he was sufficiently restored to partial health, he determined not

to run the hazard of another relapse before he had heard the wedding bells ring for their marriage, and had joined their hands for better or worse. He felt he should be more contented then. The old Hall was large enough, in all conscience, to hold half a dozen families, if necessary, and his own apartments would only be the more cheerful by his constant intercourse with those he loved.

Wishing to bring the business to a close, and set matters in their true light, he said one day to Mr. Stapleton—

“You parsons are a marrying class, and do more for the population of the land than any set of men I know of. The moment a curacy is secured, and a clear sixty pounds a year can be counted on, a wife is sure to follow, and a family, as a matter of course. I don’t know how it is with the rich rectors and vicars of the land, but Heaven bless the curates, say I. They have need of it, with a troop of children, brought up in patient suffering by the poor man and his wife, who have often not enough to live upon themselves, and yet contrive to struggle on with a large family at their heels in decency and content. In the old times of the Church—not that I would wish to praise anything before the Reformation, for though the abbots and the monks belonged to

the old time, I have always kept them in a black book by themselves ; but in old times—we must come to them after all—they managed differently, and so they ought now. I have no patience that one man should do all the work, while the other sits quietly at his ease, and pockets the money.”

“The labourers in the church, my dear sir, must be content to work ; it is in the hopes of doing good we are so eager in our calling,” interposed Mr. Stapleton.

“All very fine, and with a few crumbs of the loaves, and some of the small fishes, you might get on well enough ; but how is a man to exist, and bring up a family on little better than ploughman’s wages ; doctors and nurses to pay, clothes to buy, and a dozen mouths to feed, out of such a pittance as your own ?”

“It is very small, I own,” replied the curate, with a sigh, while the tingling blood mounted to his pale cheeks, with a feeling of hurt pride. “But I have no reason to complain, since, through my own wilful act, I lost my heritage.”

“Ay, ay ; Florence told me as much, or guessed as much, and you know how some women go on guessing and thinking all their lives. But don’t take on about that. I don’t talk to pain you, because as it is, you may reckon

on something better, and take your quarters up at the Hall, unless you think you shall grow tired of the companionship of a testy, weak old man, who likes to have his own way, and sometimes makes a sad use of it, until something else turns up, and Queen Caroline, or one of her maids of honour, makes a bishop of you ; for kissing and fat livings go by favour, as we all know, in these degenerate times."

The curate could not help smiling at this odd mixing up of similes, as he said, "Your kindness, my dear sir, can never offend, while your generous friendship only makes me the more grateful to that fortunate chance which brought me to a place where I have experienced such disinterested and unselfish affection. My only hope, my only pride, is to make myself worthy of it ; and if the devotion of a life, the unceasing desire of an earnest heart, can in any way repay that kindness, I need not tell you how constantly that devotion and that desire, shall be offered up in your behalf."

"Enough said, and more than enough," replied Mr. Dormer, "where no professions are necessary, and a man's good actions speak for themselves. And although when I was well and hearty, and more inclined to think of the brave

deeds of our forefathers than I am now, I may have fancied for a son-in-law a knight with twenty quarterings to his coat of arms, in preference to a simple curate like yourself, with nothing but his cloth, and no very large fortune to recommend him, I am willing to confess that six months of rheumatic fever, and the loss of one side of my body, have altered my notions a bit, and I would rather have a steady, well-minded, pious young man to look after my child, and do odd kind offices for myself, than the pick of all the belted knights that ever knocked a rival—right or wrong—on the head. So if you can only make up your mind to put up with my humours, and my child's as well—for she must have her way, mind that—why, there is an end of the matter; and though I cannot promise you as much as I could have done two months ago, there will be enough left when the old man is gone to make you and yours contented, and I hope happy. So, if you and Florence can only make up your minds, why, Heaven bless you both, say I."

Heaven did bless them in the promise of that hoping life which was yet to come to them. And when Florence entered the room, and the kind old man laid his hand upon her head, and blessed her, the tender recollection of all her loving ways, and

dutiful obedience to his merest wish, melted to his eyes, until at last he drew her closer to him, and with his head resting on her breast, sobbed his affections out, and gave his full consent to their union.

Mr. Stapleton and Miss Florence were going to be married; and as country people have little else to do but talk and gossip over their neighbours' affairs, the news soon spread, and there was not a hoping maid or timid bachelor all round the place but talked and chatted over it, and wished them happy. There were busy speculations in the servants' hall at Chase House. The cook and the maids were busy on the merits of the case, while Sally felt a spasm at the thought of marriage, and wondered if Lucas would ever save enough to take a public-house, and turn gentleman on his own account, as he had often promised, and make her a lady as well.

Blakeborough heard the tidings without surprise, but with a touch of jealous pain he could no more control than he could check the beating of his heart. He had loved Florence—for a time at least; and could that affection only have been returned, his eager temperament would have set no limits to his devotion. His affections, how-

ever, had been cast back upon themselves, and although he could not censure her for fickleness or deceit, his sensibility was not the less hurt, while his pride rebelled against what he conceived to be a humiliation, by a preference shown to so poor and inconsiderable a match as a country curate. He had his own especial reasons for not coming into personal collision with the object of that preference, but he was not the less inclined to be displeased with him for having proved the favourite suitor, or with her for selecting him to his disparagement.

The goodwill he bore the father made him more inclined to be tolerant than he otherwise would have been ; but for all that he could no more have brought himself to go over to the Hall and wish him joy, than he could have forgiven Upton the part he had played in bringing trouble on the old man, by forging on him in the way he had done. He felt he could no more become a witness of their joy than he could share in it, and would rather bury himself in darkness and seclusion, where no sound of joy could reach him to rankle in his breast, and make his uncomfot the more apparent by the near approach of their felicity.

No sooner had he heard of what had taken

place through the ever-communicative Lucas, than his vicious nature came into action all at once, and in one of those fits of sudden passion in which he was so constantly in the habit of indulging, he stormed at every one about him ; then hoping to cool his distempered blood by action and counter excitement, he mounted his horse, and rode off anywhere his fancy led him—anywhere so that the pace were hard, and he could keep his horse well up to it.

It was of no consequence to him which road he took so long as the way were rough, and he could urge his beast at desperate leaps ; and as that part of the country was as ill kept and the roads in about as bad a condition as possible, he had his desire gratified without having far to go for it.

It was late when he set out, and already the dusk of the early autumn night was stealing on him. He was yet some miles away, riding as fast as his jaded horse would carry him along that high Hog's Back, over which his friend Baxter had galloped once before ; and so across country, through Puttenham, Compton, through country lanes, over hedge and ditch, until he came upon the dreary Hind Head Heath, in the direction of his home.

He had never been upon that heath since the date of the robbery; and although other mails had been plundered, and other men had been hung for that, and the many other offences for which hanging was then thought a fashionable and proper punishment—whether for “shoplifting,” “counterfeiting shillings,” “falsifying certificates of marriage,” or “cutting hop-bines,”—he had purposely avoided the “Hind Head,” and the roads leading to it. Sightseers had long since given over frequenting the spot, and as the story of the stopping the mail died away, it had also ceased to be a theme of daily talk or of unusual terror. On the Petworth road a man had been murdered, and two highwaymen had been hung in chains upon the spot; that was a fresh excitement, and the old tale of the “Hind Head” became of no more moment than the rest of them, except to the landlord of the ale-house, who had still his story to tell of how the mail had been robbed, the guard knocked on the head, and how the man had been hung at Gang Hill for it.

Blakeborough galloped over the heath, and in the moody state of mind he was then in, let his horse carry him, almost without knowing it, in the direction of the “Punch Bowl.” The night

was gathering round him, and the light from the rising moon came tremblingly between dark masses of clouds, making the road light by turns or indistinct and dull, when suddenly he became aware of his near neighbourhood to the fatal spot; while before him, looming against the sky, he saw the broken line of the low Hind Head Hill, and there below it, rotting in his chains, hung poor Mike! He almost fancied he could hear the gibbet creaking, and he would have ridden off some other way, but that a kind of horrible fascination made him still keep slowly onward, with his eyes bent straining on the road before him.

Not a living creature was in sight to take the feeling of utter solitude away; all was desolate, and lone, and still; and there before him twisted the highway circling the Devil's Punch Bowl and the Hind Head Hill.

Creeping along with as slow a step as a murderer would creep upon his stealthy way, or a thief upon a sleeping man, he still kept onward, overcome by terror and distrust, and yet attracted and drawn towards it by a curiosity he could not control. Darker and darker grew the road, as the broken hill shut out what little light there was; but round the fearful hollow the road

looked more cheerless than anywhere else, and made the way appear more dismal, and more gloomy even than it was.

He looked before him and about him, expecting at every turn to see the gibbet, with its dreadful load. But no, the stone and the old cross were there; but the gibbet—where was that?

He was close upon the spot where the mail had been stopped, and there, within that shadowed nook, the four men had waited, watching its coming over the heath; another minute, and before him stood the gibbet; while discoloured by time and faded by exposure, wrapping the shrunk body of poor Mike, fluttered the remains of his fine red coat, swathing it in its loathsome folds, and clinging to it still.

Shuddering at the sight, and terror-struck with the sudden horror that now came over him, he yet looked at it; while swaying overhead the corpse went creaking on, grating with a dull heavy motion, as if to rub and chafe its chains away, and set the carcase free; and as the sound fell on his ear, his excited fancy invested it with other sounds, and thoughts, and fancies, until he almost conceived Garroway was trying to speak to him out of his compressed and blackened

throat, in half-articulated and hoarsely-sounding words, taxing him with his death, and asking how it was that he alone was set up there, when there was room enough for others than himself.

Shying at the swaying figure, the horse began to plunge, and snort, and struggle, when, with a terrified motion, Blakeborough drove his spurs deep into its sides ; then driving it at the steep hill, lashed the frightened animal over it, following the same track the highwayman had gone before, little caring where he went so long as he could be relieved from the presence of that festering corpse and the sound of that creaking gibbet, which had startled him almost as much as it had startled Garroway before.

Possessed and overcome by doubting apprehensions, he galloped on, while a nervous feeling of presentiment of something yet to come, filled up his thoughts, and made him reckless as he rode across the rough, uneven ground, and so along the crest of Blackdown Hill, and never halted until he had reached the bridle road leading to Chase House.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN OLD FRIEND WITH A NEW FACE.

No sooner had Blakeborough crossed the threshold of his house, than he perceived something unusual had occurred, and there was Lucas standing in the entrance of the hall, all eyes and wonder.

What could have happened to make the gentlemanly, easy-going Lucas shake and tremble as he did, staring at his master's pale and thoughtful face with a bewildered, startled expression? He had hardly time to gasp out, "Oh, sir! I am so glad you are come home!" when Blakeborough, recovering all his usual calmness with the near approach of anticipated danger, cut short his gaspings by saying—

"Has the house fallen about your ears, or what, that you stand shaking and opening your eyes as though you had seen a ghost! Has the cook turned you out of the kitchen? or is there more of the plate missing, and no one to give a guess where it has gone to, except the thief who stole it?"

“Shouldn’t wonder, sir; and if all the plate’s missing, it won’t be no one’s fault—not even the cook’s, though she has a way of using up spoons and forks quite miraculous. But this time it ain’t the cook, nor no one here as has a chance even of perquisites. It’s all owing to the man upstairs.”

“Man! what man?”

“Covered with dust and dirt, and as little like a gentleman as though he had lain in a ditch all his life, and had no notion of decent manners. He pushed by me, sir, as if I had been a doorpost; and when I told him ‘my master was not at home,’ it made no difference, but in he walked, sat himself down at your table, sir, and begun tearing the fowl I had placed for supper, as though he had not eaten anything for a month. If Bedlam was not so far off, and he had a broken chain round his body, I should have sworn he was an escaped lunatic, coming here on purpose to frighten me, and send me out of my mind, dreaming of cages, iron bars, and whips.”

“Leave off dreaming now,” cried his impatient master, “and come to what you have to say at once. What are you talking of, and who is he who has come to frighten you, as you say he has done?”

"It is not me, sir, as is frightened—though Sarah was when he first came in, until I told her I was there to protect her. But for all that, there is a most uncomfortable look about him, enough to make any one afraid—and so you'll say, sir, when you see him."

"See him! Where?"

"In your room, sir, sitting in your chair, sir, with as much ease as though he had a right to it, and the supper too; but that he swallowed without asking. I wish it had choked him for my part, for I don't like the looks of him—asking pardon for his being a friend of yours, sir, and as like Captain Upton as two peas about the figure, if he wasn't too dirty for a gentleman, and hadn't his face all covered with hair."

Blakeborough trembled at the very mention of the name! The presentiment of evil that had haunted him on his way home, came upon him now in all its force. Unwilling, however, to betray his weakness before the inquisitive eyes of Lucas, he summoned resolution enough to say—

"Captain Upton has been abroad these six months, and not very likely to be in this part of the country—especially in the condition you talk of. But I'll soon see who it is, and what he

wants. He makes himself at home, at all events, it seems."

Without waiting a reply, Blakeborough turned his back, and, walking up the stairs, counted with every step the chances for or against the strange man's being Upton, as his servant had supposed. Yet, if it were, how was it the sharp-sighted Lucas had not at once recognized him? He could not be so altered in his appearance, he thought, as to defeat the easy recognition of eyes used to his person, and such eyes as his faithful servant was known to possess.

Wishing to set his doubts at rest, Blakeborough nerved himself as well as he could for a meeting of no very agreeable character; and, throwing open the room door, saw a man leaning back in his chair, seated before a table cleared of everything in the shape of food, picking his teeth, and holding a half-emptied wine-glass in his hand.

Blakeborough knew him at a glance. It was Upton—but so altered, that any one less familiarized with his features would have been puzzled to recognize him. His face was pale and dirty, his hair matted, while a profusion of real or false beard, entirely concealed the lower part of his face. His foreign-looking coat and cap were

gone, and such clothes as he had on were soiled with dust and dirt, while his face and hands were grimed and dirty too.

The look of annoyance and surprise with which Blakeborough regarded him was met by one of cool indifference on the part of Upton, who left off picking his teeth, drained his half-emptied glass, then, stretching himself at ease in his chair, cried—

“Ah, Martin! is that you? I have been waiting for you this hour or more.”

“You here!” cried Blakeborough, with a look of intense hatred.

“Of course. Where else should an old friend go when he is hard up for a shelter? although your style of welcome is anything but what it ought to be, or as I could wish.”

“It shall prove something worse, unless you take your departure at once, and relieve me from the necessity of handing you over to the constable. Your cool insolence is only equalled by your villany in coming here after swearing never to trouble me again, when you had extorted your blood-money.”

“Oh! the five hundred pounds, you mean,” replied Upton, settling himself quite at his ease, “handed over to keep that business of ours quiet,

of which your friend the curate was the victim. By the way, is that little difference settled yet, or are you going to challenge him in the pulpit, and fight him in the churchyard? But that's an old tale, and the money gone long ago, as you know well enough. What of that? Starving men must eat; and men who have met with a run of ill luck must fall back upon some of their dear friends to help them at a push, or die out altogether. I have had the worst of ill luck lately, I can tell you, or you would not see me here. So don't look in that glumpy and unfriendly way because I have taken you unawares, and eaten your supper without waiting to be asked, as I knew I should be. I had not broken my fast these two days, and was as hungry as a wolf."

The cool, off-hand way of Upton, as opposed to the angry look cast upon him by Blakeborough, formed a strange contrast; and, for all his rage and justifiable fury against the man who had not only been his own undoing, but who had so recently committed the flagrant act of forging on his friend and benefactor, he could not help feeling himself kept in check by the superior dash of that cool, selfish, and unprincipled man, who, from first to last, had exercised an influence over him he could never quite throw off; but yet, de-

terminated to break through that influence, and bring matters to an end with Upton, let the consequences be what they would, he replied—

“Heartless and cold-blooded as a wolf you always were, and with as little care for the good of others. But that is over now. I know you, and you know me—or rather, you knew me once; but times are altered. I have cast you off—you and your mean, degraded vices; and I now scorn and hate, as much as I once loved you.”

“Oh! you did love me once, then?” said Upton, with a half-sneer.

“Once. But I am no longer the weak tool I was, to be led and tempted by you into crime; and I am not sorry you have perjured yourself in the way you have done, by daring to set foot in this house again, that I may have an opportunity of telling you what I think of you, face to face, and man to man.”

Upton, for all his self-possession, appeared a little staggered by the kindling eye and defying front of Blakeborough. He had hoped to have found him pliable as usual, and as easily talked over. After a slight pause, he recovered himself sufficiently to say—

“It is the way of the world, Martin. The moment a man is down in it, there is not a poor,

white-livered fellow of the lot but will be the first to throw a stone at him ; but of all the hard hitters I know of, there is no one to match a friend."

"I am one no longer, so do not slander the word by an attempted repetition of it ; you robbed me, and I consented to be robbed, for fear that lying tongue of yours should bring still greater discredit and disgrace upon me, than what you had already done. You swore to me you would never trouble me again, nor come to me again ; and yet, thief and liar that you are, I find you once more here, come with some paltry excuse or other, to endeavour to rob and plunder me again !"

"Fair words, if you please, Martin," interrupted Upton, over whose pale face a deathlike hue had fallen, "fair words, or I *may* be tempted to forget what I swore. Many a man has, before to-day, and so may I, although I never meant it when I came here."

"You did, or why have you come?"

"To ask you to do a friend's part by me, and give me food and shelter for a time ; I am in debt, and the bailiffs are after me. You know what a knack they have of hunting a man up, if they have a chance of clapping him inside a sponging-house."

"Inside Newgate, you mean, where you will hang a convicted felon, if they once lay hands upon you. Do you think to blind me, or that I am not aware of your villanous practices?"

"What do you mean?" replied Upton, with a half-startled glance at Blakeborough.

"I mean you are a worse thief and a worse forger than ever hung upon a rope. Do you think I do not know you, or that the walls of London are at this moment placarded with a reward for your apprehension?"

"How in the devil's name do you know that?" almost gasped Upton, rising from his chair, and turning on Blakeborough his pale, haggard face, now grown paler and more haggard than before.

"And now, almost within sight of the man's house whom you have robbed, you have the insolence to come and ask shelter of me; but I have vowed to give you up, to hunt you up, and hand you over to the judgment of the law, and rid the world of one of the worst specimens that ever stood upon two legs. You thought I had not heard of you and your rascally practices, or how a foreign-looking man, in a cap and beard, whom I saw in Holborn, as you know well enough, was hunted far and wide, and that a reward of five hundred pounds was offered for his apprehension."

Upton had sunk upon his chair again, while a nervous trembling came upon him, as Blakeborough recounted his knowledge of his past actions. His former swaggering had disappeared, and all that was left of the cool, self-possessed, and insolent Captain Upton was the detected, trembling coward. He looked towards Blakeborough, imploringly, for a time, then, stretching out his hands, almost prayed of him to befriend and save him, as he said—

“I swear to you, Martin, as truly as there is light above us, I came here with no thoughts against you; I came because I have been hunted all over the country, lying in ditches and in sheds by day, and creeping along the roads by night, with the scouts still following on the scent. There are five hundred pounds hanging round my neck, as a bait to lure these bloodhounds on, and it was only by constantly disguising my face with this beard, I have stolen so far off at all. If I could only reach the coast, I might stand a chance of slipping away, but I have been driven about like a mad dog, without a bite or sup between my teeth, or without a shilling to buy it with, or even had I had money, I should not have dared to venture in a village bakehouse for a loaf of bread, to save me from starving. They have my description pretty

rightly now, and my name, too—thanks to that wild cat of yours, who I told you would, some day or other, be our ruin.”

“Whom do you mean?” asked Blakeborough, interested, almost without knowing it, in the escapes and dangers Upton said he had gone through.

“Who? why, the gamekeeper’s daughter, old Dick Coombs’s wench, whom you cast off some time ago.”

“Nelly! I have had London searched from one end to the other, hoping to find her, but without success,” was Blakeborough’s eager and startled reply.

“I wish I had known it; I would have put her in your way long ago—not that I owe her a good turn, for I am satisfied she will never rest until she has ruined me.”

“I would give anything to find her—her, and her child,” said Blakeborough, while a glistening moisture mounted to his eyes.

“For my part, I wish I had never meddled with her,” replied Upton, “but had let her stay where I first found her, to bless you with the full benefit of her charms. She hates me, I suppose, because I started her off, and, more fool she, because I tried to kiss her. But she is in London

now, safe enough, and I first saw her as she was going to market, with her basket of flowers on her head. I knew her well enough, but did not think she would have known me with this splendid growth upon my chin, my cap, and foreign-looking coat—the last time I ever wore them, by the way. But she had sharper eyes than I gave her credit for, and by some means or other, traced me out, watched me, as she has watched you before to-day, no doubt; me, and your old friend Baxter chumming it in a second floor, in an out-of-the-way lodging in John Street, at the back of Tottenham Court Road.”

“Do you know if she has a child?” inquired Blakeborough, falteringly.

“What if she has? He can’t inherit the estate, you know, or add another branch to your genealogical tree.”

“That may be,” said Blakeborough; “yet I would give half I possess to know how that mother and that child are.”

“I am sorry I can’t inform you, then, or I should be happy in availing myself of your terms. I never stopped to ask the spitfire as to the health of her family, but brushed by her when I met her face to face, a little better than a week ago, hoping to pass unnoticed. She had a mind to speak to

me, it seems, which was more than I desired, so I pushed by her rather roughly, and it appears stirred up the old gamekeeper's blood in her, for the young vixen flew at my throat, collared me in the middle of the street, and shouted to the passers by to lay hold of me, as a rogue and thief. I had some little trouble in shaking her off, I can tell you, for she clung to me with her ten claws, like a young tigress, as she is, and I had to make a bolt of it, with all the quicksilver I could put into my heels, for there were a dozen or more after me in no time, and good chasers, too; only I had the advantage of knowing a few odd turnings, which enabled me to baulk and double on them; though not for long, for those sharp-scented gentlemen from Bow Street—one of them, a very old friend of mine, whom I had the pleasure of meeting in Fleet Street—came up after I was started, gleaned all particulars from this wild country colt of yours, whom they found willing enough to have her revenge of me, by imparting all she knew, and as Nic Upton was already on their good book, and five hundred pounds offered for him in his beard and cap, I have been hunted, as a necessary consequence, from every hole and corner, until, as a last resource, I thought of my old friend, Martin, who, I hoped, whatever wrongs

I might have been guilty of, would not hold the rope to hang me, if he had a chance of cutting it, but would give me the means of escape, if he had it in his power.”

Upton had by this time recovered all his former self-possession, and in his solicitation to Blakeborough, spoke with as strong a show of feeling as if he had really experienced it. It answered his purpose admirably, and for a few moments Blakeborough appeared confounded by the appeal of his old companion. Nerving himself, however, against an influence he found stealing over him again, in spite of all his resolution to the contrary—an influence which Upton began to think he could again exert,—he said, calmly but firmly—

“You are right when you suppose I would not willingly turn thief-taker on my own account, or hand you over, as I once thought I could have done, to the executioner; but all connection between us two has ended. You have forfeited, by this recent act, all the good feeling I once had for you, and I never will know you again, or recognize you in any sense, shape, or way. You have betrayed the trust I reposed in you, and, taking advantage of your association with me, possessed yourself of the means by which you could forge

upon a man to whom I am under the deepest obligation. You have robbed him and his child; and now I say to you, Nicholas Upton, no longer darken my door by your ill-omened presence. I could forgive your faults, and pardon all the wrong you have done to me personally, but while I commiserate your sufferings, and perhaps sympathize with you in your present danger, I will lend no hand to help or aid you; therefore, be gone at once, and do not compel me to a course which will at once destroy you."

Upton appeared confounded by the resolute, yet calm tone Blakeborough now assumed, unlike his usual impetuosity, which he would have known how to meet and humour well enough. But he had still his game to play, and hoped to lead him on to what he wished.

"Martin," he said, "hear me and hear me patiently, for my words come from me in my uttermost need, in trouble, and distress. I am hunted, as I have told you, hunted for my life, and through the agency of one whose spite I should never have encountered but through helping you. I implore you by all the ties that once bound us, not to cast me out from the shelter of your doors like a run-down fox, to be torn piecemeal by those greedy hounds who lie in wait for

me, and who would hang, draw, and quarter me for a tithe of what is offered. I beg of you, as I would beg a mercy of the judge, whose words would cut me off from life. All I ask of you is concealment, and a little money to ship me off in some disguise to where I can never be heard of, or trouble you again. Hear me, Martin, as an old friend should hear me, and save me."

However deaf Blakeborough might have been to this appeal of his old friend, there were a pair of ears fastened to the keyhole of the door that drank in every word. The caution that had hitherto distinguished Blakeborough in his private talk, or secret doings, had been forgotten in the unexpected and unpleasant visit of Upton, whose own wretched condition and recent escape from danger, had made him equally forget the peril he ran in the very comfort he now enjoyed. There was no Bow Street runner of them all from whom he ran a greater risk, or from whom he was in greater danger than from the listening Lucas, who having heard enough to satisfy his utmost curiosity, slunk from the door and crept up to his room to think. Let them open the door now if they liked. He had heard enough, and more than enough to keep his eyes open for the rest of the night.

He had no occasion to tax his thinking powers to any great extent or write to the Jew, as he had made up his mind to, for the clattering of horses in the court-yard startled him from his cogitations to listen to what the noise could be, and wonder what visitors could possibly want at that time of night. He had had one fright already in the apparition of Upton, and did not want another, unless with as good a prospect of making something out of it.

The noise had startled Upton, too. Rising from his chair he approached the window with the utmost caution, and peeping from it, beheld two horsemen in the court-yard talking together, and pointing up at the house. Trembling with alarm he rushed towards Blakeborough as if with the intention of throwing himself on his knees before him, so wholly had terror taken possession of him, as he prayed his old friend to shelter him from the men who had come to capture him. They were the officers from whom he had escaped the night before, and who had no doubt traced him to his present refuge, through the knowledge of his former association with Blakeborough, and were prepared with a search-warrant for his apprehension.

Almost paralyzed with fear he cried, "Save

me, Martin, save me, unless you wish to see me carted to Tyburn, sitting on my coffin, to swing upon the tree ; to die, Martin, die like a dog ! By all the hopes you have of mercy yourself, hide me from them. I'll pray to you, Martin, kneel to you."

His agitation prevented his saying more, while Blakeborough as he looked upon the terror-stricken man, felt his former resolution giving way ; and although Nic Upton, who had done him so much wrong, and on whose head he had called such heavy vengeance, stood powerless before him, and one word of his would hand him over to the officers, he felt he could not speak that word, but if the worst came to the worst, would rather fight for him as he had often fought before, than see him handcuffed as a prisoner under the roof where he had come to beg a shelter. Had it been *his* case, he thought, he would have made a sudden dash, and have tried to save his life by risking it in some desperate adventure. But Upton, he knew, had no courage to back him at a push like this, and that the only hope of saving him was by concealment.

Yielding to a weakness he felt was vacillating and unjustifiable, he said, after a few moments' pause, " Forfeited as your life is to the law, I will endea-

vour to save you from the consequences of your villany in the hope you may yet live to atone for your past errors ; and in that hope I will hide you where there is little chance of your being sought for or discovered. So no more words, but follow me and be silent."

He locked and bolted the room-door, took a lamp from the table, passed rapidly to the far end of the apartment, then pressing a small knob threw open a portion of the panelling skirting the sides of the room, then beckoning Upton to follow, led the way through the aperture.

No sooner had they emerged from the opening than they found themselves at the head of a steep winding staircase, leading by a twisted flight of stone steps to the foundation of the old mansion, and of only sufficient width to admit of one person passing at a time ; its circuitous and corkscrew stair diving to the underground vaults or secret passages lying underneath, whence it found some secret exit, or communications with other vaults and passages, and so away to subterraneous outlets from the lower portions of the house.

Shading the lamp with his hand Blakeborough led the way without a moment's pause, followed by Upton, as he went cautiously down the well-

like stair, step by step descending by its circling rounds towards the deep foundations of Chase House.

There was no fear of eaves-droppers in that secret way, yet Blakeborough constrained himself to whisper as he went, threading his passage down that narrow and apparently never-ending flight, how his father had discovered it searching for hidden passages and subterraneous ways. But this was the only one he remembered, and led, as he had heard his father say, to the disused cellars, whose other approaches had been walled up long ago, and where Upton could remain concealed until he could find means for sending him abroad.

They had proceeded down the greasy flight some considerable distance, when they found their further passage blocked up by a thick oak door, clamped with nails, and crossed with iron bands, let into the solid masonry, and secured against all approaches from below by a heavy bar of wood placed crossways, and fixed at either end in iron staples.

They had some little difficulty in removing this for the iron was thickly coated with a mass of rust, and the wooden bar itself was slimy to the touch, mouldering with damp, and crumbling

away ; and yet for all the mouldering damp and the deep crust of rust, Upton's watchful glance thought he detected some trace of recent handling, and that the encrustations at the sides appeared to have been disturbed at no very distant date, as Blakeborough passed to him the lamp and wrenched the wooden bar away.

Forced back upon its rusty hinges the door was thrown wide open, and there below it was a flight of precipitous steps, slippery and green with slimy damp, while the unwholesome vapour coming from the shut-up vaults struck coldly on them, blearing their eyes, and hanging to their clothes, while the flame from the lamp dwindled to a mere speck in that dark, cheerless cave, and seemed half-inclined to go out altogether. Yet small as it was Upton begged Blakeborough to leave it as a companion to him, if for little other use.

“ It would be missed by that prying fellow of mine,” said Blakeborough. “ Besides, I have no time to lose, for should they come up to my room while I am absent, they might grow suspicious ; therefore be patient, and wait here until I can think of what is to be done. You have nothing to fear, the vault is large, and the ground even although damp ; so make yourself

contented, and be thankful it is not the condemned cell instead."

Without another word Blakeborough mounted the greasy flight of steps leading to the door, and in the act of closing it, saw Upton's pale face glaring at him like a ghost's, so sallow, terror-stricken, and unnatural it appeared in the uncertain ray that fell upon it, through the partly opened doorway.

Blakeborough closed the door, let the bar fall down, retraced his way up the winding stair, and came at last to the open panel, which he shut behind him, placed the light upon the table, unlocked the room-door, then sinking on a chair sat like one who had just awakened from the recollection of a frightful dream. He sat motionless for some time, until at last an uncontrollable sense of fear stole over him, and muttering to himself, he said, "I have saved him, and lost myself perhaps! I had done a wiser thing to let those fellows in, and rid myself for ever of him. It is too late now to alter it, so I must stand my chance of the rest in the best way I can."

CHAPTER IX.

UNDERGROUND.

LEFT to himself in the utter blank of the dark and midnight vault into which Blakeborough had conducted him, Upton stood for a few moments bewildered and aghast! His first sensation was a feeling of safety from the pursuit of the officers, and the next of horror! Suppose Blakeborough should have shut him up, as in a charnel-house, on purpose to get rid of him, and left him there to die! He had seen him go up the steps leading towards the iron-bound and fastened door, as though his last hope had faded with the light he carried. He heard the heavy bar fall down, shutting him in as in a grave, with not a glimpse of the outer world to cheer and comfort him, nor had he even the poorest prisoner's consolation, of seeing reflected on his prison wall the glimmering rays of that illuminating sun, to come upon him in his gloom, and cheer him with a sense of fellowship and consolation, by looking at its bright and streaming ray, moted with floating atoms, glanc-

ing across the gloom of his dark house, to cheer him with its light, and bless him with its radiance.

The heavy bar fell down, when, terrified with the sudden darkness that now fell on him, he rushed towards the steps, and clambering up them on his hands and knees, beat at the door, hammering with his fists, and hallooing after Martin to come back to him, and take him from that dismal place, which, for aught he knew, might be a repository for dead men's bones, and mouldering corpses. He called, shouted, and called again ! but his voice had no vibration in it, and fell upon his ear with a dull, stifling sound, tuneless and dull within that cavern's walls !

Had Blakeborough left him there to die ? die of starvation ! shut him up purposely, while he feigned a wish to save him, only to make a surer riddance of him ? Or should Martin himself die, and leave him there to waste and pine with hunger, until madness came upon him, and he should eat his very flesh in his despair ! He felt sure of it at last, and began raving against Blakeborough with a fearful cry. Then falling upon his knees on that damp earthy floor, he shrieked out a frightful curse, condemning him to a worse fate than his—

to tortures infinite, and like him, to die without a hope !

But with the worst came better thoughts, and he began at last to think, that Martin, after all, might yet mean well ; or could it be that his own conscience prompted his suggestions as to Blakeborough's bad faith, and tempted him to think that other men might act as he would have done, with any one whose evidence he wished to be set free of ? Martin had never played him false, and yet, why had he left him in a gloom like that, and in a hewn-out cavern cut from the solid rock, without food, or light, or warmth ?

As he became a little more familiarized to the gloom of the dark vault, the blackness grew less intense and palpable than when the light at first had disappeared, fading like a ray of hope before his sight ! Moving with cautious steps about the place, he passed his hands over the rough, uneven sides of the vaulted chamber, while percolating through the crevices of the rock, drops of water kept dripping down, causing a strange unearthly sound, coming like a death-watch upon the stillness of the night, or reeking down the sides, flowed over the surface of the cold pasty earth. How many careworn wretches might have groaned their lives away in such a place as this, or becom-

ing crazed with loss of light, had dashed themselves against the sharp angles of the rock, battering in their heads rather than live in such a hopeless gloom ! Or if they lived their dark existence through, lived on as chattering idiots, clinging to the rocks when any tried to take them from them, as men have grown in love with caves and prison walls before, as the only things they valued, kissing and fondling them like old familiar friends of half a century. Should he be shut up there to come to that sad pass, or die a maniac ?

As these and other thoughts came crowding over him, the intensity of his fear made him shake and tremble in every limb ; until at last the cowardly spirit of that heartless man mounted to his eyes, and crying like a child, he dashed himself upon the ground in hopeless misery.

Had he been dreaming ; or was a draft of air blowing on him as he laid ? Crawling along the ground, he huddled in a corner and sat listening, as he heard, or thought he heard, a low rustling as of dried leaves, followed by the snapping of wood.

With his eyes straining towards the spot, he looked awhile in fearful apprehension, but could see nothing, although he thought a glimmering of gray pale light streamed on him as he crouched,

while he fancied he heard a something scraping on the ground, as though some animal were creeping to its lair. He had no courage to call out or startle the thing that frightened him, although the noise was too distinct and certain now for him to doubt but that some living thing had found its way into the vault in which he was concealed, where it was moving about, and scraping up something in a corner.

Suddenly he heard the click of flint and steel, when, lighted by their starry sparkles, he was able to discern the figure of a man resting on his knees, and striking at something held between his hands.

Falling at last upon some dried leaves, the sparks kindled in the midst, then shot up in a small fan of flame, while the stooping figure began blowing it with his mouth, and piled fresh sticks and fuel on it, until the fire blazed and lit the arched dungeon up with a red flickering tinge. And there the figure crouched before it, while the smoke went curling overhead, and through some unseen aperture, found a passage into some of the chimneys of the house, so that a person hiding in the vault might live in warmth and comfort, and no one from the outside see the smoke or smell it; though Lucas had, when it found its

way into his room at night, making him afraid to go to bed and sleep.

The fire blazed at last, crackling and mounting upward in one continuous sheet of flame ! There was no occasion now to puff and blow at it. The fire could take care of itself, and moving to the gap through which he first had crawled, the man stuffed it up with furze and brushwood, effectually concealing it from observation : then passing to the glowing hearth, he rubbed his hands before it, and sat chafing and warming them.

It was no vision, and on that old man's face, unshaven for months, his straggling snow-white hair shading his heavy brows, Upton gazed, and thought he traced, spite of the worn, half-savage look, the face had now acquired, the countenance of someone he had seen before ; and as the bright reflection fell upon it, he recognized in the wandering eyes, and falling jaw, the altered features of poor Dick Coombs.

How had he come there, and for what purpose ? Had he been hunted too, and like himself driven to seek a shelter in that miserable place ; or had he made a home of it now his girl was stolen away, and abandoned his old cottage in the Quell ? With his eyes fastened on him, Upton watched him from the dark corner where

he crouched, and in silent dread of what he might do to him if he were once discovered lurking there, regarded his least movement, and noted all he did.

Placing his gun against an angle of the rock, Dick sat himself down in the full blaze of the fire, and drawing from his pouch a bird, to all appearance freshly killed, commenced plucking its feathers. This was not a long nor difficult operation, as turning it first on one side, then the other, he tore at it with hungry impatience, and seemed half inclined to eat it as it was. Burning the remainder of the feathers off, he passed an iron prong clean through it, stuck it before the fire, and watched it as it steamed and cooked.

There was something almost fearful in the watcher and the watched, as in that gloomy, half-lit cave they both looked on—Coombs at the fire, Upton at the sitting figure shadowing between him and the hot hearth: until at last the old man, rising from his task, began pacing about, and with his measured tread went up and down, holding at times his head between his hands, or beating them upon his breast. There was a wild, unsettled look about his eyes, and as the bright reflection from the fire fell upon his careworn face, Upton almost fancied he was shut up

with a mad man, and should be strangled by him at the least movement he should make. And yet he thought if he could only make friends with him by telling him of his daughter, the old man might be won to think kindly of him, and perhaps lend him his assistance to escape from where he was, and remove him from the custody of Blakeborough, in whose power he felt he had so unwisely placed himself, and who might use that power by keeping him a prisoner all his days, if only for the fear of what he yet might do to him, by exposing his errors or involving him in the disgrace and misery attendant on his association with himself. The question was, how he should venture to address him, or make him sensible of what he purposed; or whether Dick were not too crazy and too mad to make out what he might say, or understand what he purposed to acquaint him with.

His further cogitations were cut short by the startled expression of Coombs's face, while his eyes fastened on him with a look of wondering observation, watching him with a half-conscious, half-insane expression in them, and glaring at him like a wolf.

He had paused in his heavy pacing up and down, and in the act of throwing a fresh handful

on the fire, had turned to watch the light it threw, when he became aware of the crouching figure of Upton huddled in a corner, and looking at him. For a time the old man stared at him in return, not quite knowing what to make of him, but he only stared ; while Upton, half-afraid to speak, and yet hoping to calm him down by soothing words, said, very gently—

“Coombs, Dick Coombs !”

“Who’s that talks o’ Dick Coombs, as though he know’d ’um ? There’s not many as does now, and mayhap your one on ’em as wants to chain me up—there’s a dozen on ’em would like to do it, if they only know’d the way. But I’ll soon settle that ; I can shoot you, if I can’t the master.”

In another instant, Dick’s gun was at his shoulder, while Upton, starting to his feet, shrieked out with sudden terror, “Don’t fire, Dick, if you love heaven don’t, and I’ll tell you where Nelly is.”

“Tell me where my Nelly is !” said the old man, dropping the muzzle of his gun. “I don’t want no tellin’ ; she’s up above us in the clouds, and shines so bright upon my head it turns me giddy, and makes my head have odd feelin’s in it—opens and shuts like, sometimes.”

“She’s alive, Dick,” continued Upton, think-

ing to win the old man over and tame him down, more especially as he still kept his gun in his hand, "alive and well."

"It's a lie, and you knows it!" cried Dick, louring at him from his threatening brows. "If Nell was alive, would she let her old father bide in a hole like this, when she could come and take him out of it? No, no! she's dead fast enough, and I wish I war dead too, if only to see poor Nell again." His passion was all gone now, his head drooped upon his breast, and he was silent once again.

Still thinking to humour him and soothe him down, Upton resumed—

"She was a smart girl when she was alive, Dick, quite a country beauty; and I saw a girl the other day in London as like her as if she had been her sister."

"Saw my girl—saw my Nell! What do you mean? Or are you the squire come in the shape of the devil to drive me out of my wits? But be you squire or devil, I'll know the looks of you the next time we meet."

Before Upton had time to think or move, Coombs had darted on him, and setting the knuckles of his strong bony fist into his throat, dragged him to the fire, stared at him long and

earnestly, then let him go again, and sank upon a log of wood, without taking further notice of him.

Strong man as Upton was, he was like a child in the sinewy grasp of Coombs, and willing to humour him as far as he could, he made no more resistance than was necessary; he knew that opposition would only rouse the old man's passions, and until he could get his gun from him, he thought the best plan was to coax and let him have his way.

"I am a stranger in these parts, as you see, Coombs; but I have heard of you, and came on purpose to have a chat about old times, when you were gamekeeper, and lived at the Quell yonder. The old squire was a good 'un—wasn't he Dick?"

"Something like a man; but the race has died out, and there's none on 'em to be met with nowheres now."

"Not many; but there are some who wish you well, and are sorry to see you live the life you do. But here is your bird done, Dick. Eat it, it will do you good."

Almost unconsciously Dick allowed himself to be assisted and talked to, while he tore the bird to pieces and ate it ravenously, gnawing the

flesh between his teeth with a greedy appetite, as though he had not tasted food for days. Upton had been hungry too, and watched the old man eat it with no displeased attention.

"How do you feel now, Dick?" he asked, when the bones were well picked, or half-consumed between the iron jaws of Coombs.

"More comfortable about the stomach like, but dry, dry as a faggot."

"If some of these old casks were full now," said his companion, "we could have a drink of ale. How came these old barrels in the cellar, Dick?"

His eyes were less wandering now, and the gentle tone of voice Upton spoke to him in, disarmed the old man's anger, as he sat side by side with his new visitor, and appeared more reasonable and consistent than he had been.

"Oh! these barrels you mean? This war the old squire's ale-cellar when I war a boy; but it war bricked up years gone by, and nothing left in it but the empty casks, as are 'most too rotten to burn, tho' they does well enough when the fire's hot, and I piles some of the old staves on when I goes to sleep down here," said Dick, pointing with his finger to the ground before the fire.

“How did you find your way in here, Dick?”

“Oh, easy. When they druv me to the woods, and I had no place to lie in, I scraped at the old wall at night, and by pokin’ and scrapin,’ knocked that hole through it, which I stuff up, as you see, when I goes in or out; and here I lie at night, and days too if it comes to that, till I want something to eat, and I don’t find none left in the old tree, where friends, as used to know me when I was another guess sort of man, leaves it for me sometimes. I have lain under the old house for months, ever since I was hunted by *him*! But I hope to kill ’um some day—kill ’um, and stamp upon ’um too!”

Dick’s eyes were kindling again, while his hand grasped the barrel of his gun with nervous twitching, and Upton had some little difficulty in persuading him to listen to him. Any allusion to Blakeborough, he found acted like a spell upon the old man, and made his head wander, while an all-absorbing spirit of revenge engrossed his mind, and made him tremble with the intensity of his rage.

“And so you have never heard of Nelly since she ran away?” said Upton.

“Poor lass! poor wench!”

As the thoughts of his lost child came over him, the old man sighed, and he sat rocking himself before the fire, while the tears fell trickling down his hollow cheeks.

"Wouldn't it do you good to see her again, Dick, and have her once more with you?"

"Ay! ay! mayhap it might. But she's dead, poor lass, and all her pretty red and white's gone to clay. Dead, and drowned, long ago, and all along o' him. But I'll hit 'um some day, don't you fear, and see if his blood's as black as we think for." Dick's hands began to clench his gun again, and he sat grinding his teeth, with only thinking of the squire.

"There is time enough for that, when you have found your girl," said Upton; "and I fancy I could put you in the way to do it, if you'll only be patient, and not talk of killing the squire in the way you do. Not that I owe him any good will, more than you do, and should like to bring his pride down a bit, if I only knew how, for the fine airs he has always given himself, and now worse than ever, when he finds I am down in the world and can't help myself. I only wish I had a chance of talking to *him* in the same way he talks to me, I'd make him feel what I would do."

“Oh! you’re one of his fine chaps, are you, as is come to spy on me. If I had know’d that afore——”

“I tell you I hate him, Dick; hate him as much as you do; and though I was once his friend, I have come to detest him, and should like to see him humbled, and crawling in the dust. I should like to be able to stand with my hands in my pockets, and see Master Martin Blakeborough begging in his turn of me; begging and praying, as he has made me beg and pray. It would do me good, if I could only once live to see it.”

As he spoke, Upton’s face assumed a malicious expression, until, in his imagination, he almost fancied he saw Blakeborough kneeling at his feet, and then his face became more pale and more malicious still.

“Why don’t you fight ’um like a man, then? You’re not hunted as I am, hidin’ by day, and only going out, like a bat, by night.”

“I must bide my time, Dick, for just now I am in his power, and can’t help myself. But if ever it comes to my turn, let Martin Blakeborough look to himself, that’s all. And now, Dick, to your part of the game. I promised to let you know where Nelly was, and I will, too, if you’ll

only do a wise man's part, and not fly out in a passion, as you did just now."

Dick made no reply, but sat staring at him, with a bewildered, and only half-conscious expression in his face.

"She is alive, Dick," Upton went on to say—"alive, and strong enough to hold a man like a vice, if she has a mind to keep him from running away, that I can tell you. She is up in London, selling flowers, and I'll write down on a piece of paper where you may find her."

The old man did not even smile, or look as though he understood him. He had too long taught himself to believe his girl was dead, to be awakened so suddenly from the half imbecility that had fallen on him. There was a still more vacant look about his eyes, but that was all, although whenever his daughter or Blakeborough's name was mentioned, he seemed to start at it, as though a small electric shock had shot throughout his frame. His recollection only alive to two things—his love of his daughter, and his hatred of the squire.

The embers on the earth were drawing in their light, and the flame subsiding from the yet glowing wood, when Upton, who by this time had mastered his fear of the old man, and began

to regard him as something to be made useful, and subservient to his pleasures, told him, almost with an air of authority, "To put more fuel on; the damp air of the vault was anything but agreeable, and they might as well make themselves comfortable while they were about it."

Almost mechanically Coombs rose from his log of wood, at the some moment that Upton, with a stealthy movement, shifted himself to the other side of the fire-place, so as to be as near the gun as possible. Meanwhile Coombs went rambling about among the old casks, for some staves or broken wood to throw upon the fire, and dragging from under the old barrels such lumber as he could find, cast them towards the place where Upton stood, then striking with his foot the hollow head of an old cask, tumbled it to pieces, and there was fuel enough to keep them warm throughout the night. Piling a heap on to the glowing hearth, they stood watching the fire for a time, until the damp and rotted wood began to steam and smoke, then kindling into flame, lit up the vaulted space around them, and they could see more clearly into the rocky dungeon, than they had seen at all before.

The fire blazed, and as there was plenty of

fuel now, Upton was about taking his place upon the only seat there was, leaving Dick Coombs to manage as he could, when his quick eye fell upon something lying on the ground. It looked like a piece of metal, or such like substance, that by chance had fallen among the rotting staves, and now shone dimly out from the heaped-up pile of wood, and the accumulated rubbish dragged from under the casks.

He stood looking at it for a time, unable to make out what it was like, or what it could be, and was on the point of turning from it, when his eye glanced at it again. Thinking to satisfy his curiosity, and at the same time place the pile of lumber in easy distance of the fire, he kicked at it with his foot, and tumbled it over in a heap. Yet there the piece of metal laid upon the top, as if to ask him to take it up, and look at it again.

He stooped. But instead of the piece of brass, or whatever it was, remaining in his hand, he found it was attached to something heavy, and dragging at it, pulled from the gathered heap a mildewed and rotting leathern bag, to which another rotting bag was tied, and another piece of metal fixed to that as well. Wondering what fortune had thrown in his way, he pulled them

closer to the fire, and in the bright clear flame, looked at them with all the eyes he had.

The bags were full of something, and forcing them open, he tumbled out a mass of torn up paper, letters, deeds, and documents, all rent, and split, and torn into small fragments; and there, upon the side of the bags, was affixed a brass plate, with the crown and royal arms embossed upon the surface.

A sudden thought flashed through his mind, as clutching at them in his eager hands, he rubbed and polished up the plates with the sleeve of his coat, and there upon them, beyond all doubt or question, was stamped the royal cypher. Bursting into boisterous and triumphant glee, he held the bags out at arms length, shook them free from any clinging matter, and shouted in his joy—

“You’ll rob the mail again, will you, Master Martin? Stop it on Hind Head Heath, to serve some purpose of your own, and let others pay the penalty, while the chief thief plunders the bags, and hides them in his cellar, after he has stripped them of their contents. I see it as plainly now as though I had had a hand in it myself. Friend Baxter and Bridgeman, too, close as wax, for all my pumping, passing the stolen notes, and the

gibbet set up on "Hind Head" for flashy Mike. I have had a guess of it a long time, and could see my way clearly enough to three of them; but he was a man of so much *[honour]*, I could hardly bring myself to fix it upon him, or tax him with being a party to it. But now I have him, and if I don't make him shake for it, my name's not Nic Upton. Double dealing, respectable highwayman, that he is, if I swing, I'll swing in good company, at all events."

Dick Coombs had taken up the bags as well, and sat looking at them, with a sort of half perception of what his companion meant, while Upton, as though his joy were too great to be repressed, drew himself to his full height, swelled out his chest, and the debased and shrinking coward appeared all of a sudden to have changed natures, and become a daring, bold-faced fellow, who would have taken his part in any venture that required a cool head, and a bold heart, to accomplish; so immediate an effect had the sense of power given him, and so instantaneous was the revulsion of feeling that came over him, with the knowledge it was his turn now, and that Martin Blakeborough was at his mercy.

CHAPTER X.

ABOVE GROUND.

Not many minutes had elapsed after Blakeborough re-entered the chamber he had recently quitted, when a loud knocking startled him into a sense of the new difficulty he had to encounter, in putting the officers off the scent, and accounting for the disappearance of Upton. He had but a short time to think of this, when he heard a busy talk below, and going to the stair-head, listened to the rough voices of men speaking to Lucas, who had descended from his room at the first sound of the horsemen, desirous as he was at all times, of gathering information at a cheap rate, and making a market out of anything that might come.

Without allowing time for further conversation, Blakeborough called out and asked, "What the noise was, and what the knocking meant, at that time of night?"

"If you please, sir," replied the ready-tongued Lucas, "here is two gentlemen who have come

all the way from London on a bit of police business."

"Let them come up—that is if they have any business with me—or wait until the morning, when I shall be more at leisure."

"“If you please, sir,” replied Lucas, after an under-tone conference with the men, “they say they would rather see you now, sir, if it makes no difference.”

“Very well, let them come up.”

It was a hard struggle to appear calm, but Blakeborough so far mastered himself as to assume a greater degree of indifference than he could have supposed himself capable of, when he saw two men in drab great-coats, and top-boots, come into the room, followed by Lucas, who looked about him with a wondering, yet sly expression, when he saw his master sitting by himself, and the man with the beard and the huge appetite vanished, Heaven knew where! He had not gone out of the house, neither had he run up the staircase; Lucas had kept too good a lookout for that; and unless he had climbed up the chimney, or had broken his neck jumping from the window, he had not a guess where he had gone to.

As Blakeborough had no very great desire

for the presence of that attentive individual, he motioned Lucas out of the room, and then inquired of the two men, "What business had brought them to his place at that time of night?"

"Sorry to disturb your honour," replied one of the men, with a remarkably red face, and a spotted handkerchief twisted round his chin; "it's a disagreeable job, but can't be helped. Our information is pretty good, and we have some reasons for thinking an old friend of mine, and of your honour's too, I believe, is not far off."

"A friend of mine! Whom do you mean?"

"Well, if I must mention names, though I'd rather not, I should say no gentleman in his majesty's dominions has a greater chance of testing the merits of trial by jury than Master Nic Upton. Excuse my being familiar with your honour's friend, but I have known him a long time by sight, and hope to have him as a visiting acquaintance before long."

"With all my heart," replied Blakeborough. "I know whom you mean well enough, and have powerful reasons for wishing him punished, and out of the way. Yet, even if he were a greater rascal than he is, I would not turn thief-taker on my own account."

“I see you know the man,” resumed the first speaker, “by the good character you give him ; but as we are thief-takers by profession, and have no scruples of that sort, we’ll nab my gentleman, if he’s to be had, only for the pleasure of the thing. We thought we had him safe enough last night, a few miles from here, but he gave us the double just as we were about pouncing on him, and we have a sort of fancy in our heads we could clap a pair of handcuffs on him, without going any farther than where we are.”

Blakeborough knew Lucas was watching through the half-closed door, and that that keen-eyed watcher had seen Upton sitting in the room only a short time before, and that he must therefore lead them off the scent without exciting his or their suspicions.

“I will not attempt to conceal from you,” Blakeborough went on to say, “the man you mention has been here. He came during my absence, presuming on our old acquaintance, to beg a shelter of me ; but I warned him from my place, and he is now, most likely, hiding in some of the woods about here. My man can tell you, as well as I can, I was not aware of his being here ; and he can also tell you—for he is very attentive to what happens in this house—he has not passed

from this room into the apartments overhead. Finding I would not harbour him, he dropped out of the window—you'll find it open—when he heard you ride into the court-yard."

Lucas was puzzled, so were the officers, by the cool, circumstantial account given by Blakeborough. Had Upton dropped from the window after all, and had the reward for taking him slipped through their fingers? Lucas made up his mind at all events to look, and see if there were any footmarks under the casement, or on the flower-beds that lay beneath, to set his mind at ease.

"It is not our place to doubt a gentleman's word," resumed the officer who acted as spokesman, "but business is business. There is a tidy reward for taking this fellow, and no end of worry at head-quarters to get it done at once too, as it is thought a portion of his booty may be found on him; independent of which, I should like to clap him in four walls, if only to make up for the go-byes he has given me. But if I let him have another chance, Joe Ketcher had better give up thief-taking to some one who understands the business better."

"As you like—only don't disturb my house unnecessarily. It is late, and time my people

were in bed," said Blakeborough, with an air of well-assumed indifference.

The man Joe, who was evidently the most sharp-witted of the two officers, here walked coolly to the window, which he found open, as Blakeborough had said, then, leaning from it, looked long and earnestly below. Satisfied with his inspection, he turned towards Blakeborough once again, and said—

"It's a tidy jump, but I have seen as good a one afore to-day. A man doesn't mind his legs so much, when he's a chance of saving his neck. He's not here, at all events—unless there's a closet big enough to hold his six-foot nothing."

Walking round the apartment, the man eyed about it carefully; then, returning to his companion, he said, in a vexed and disappointed tone—

"Slipped us again, Ned; and it's odds if we get the five hundred pounds arter all. But he may have broken a limb, or given his ancle an awkward twist jumping from the window, and we may down upon him yet, if we keep our eyes open. Good night, your honour. These kind of jobs ain't pleasant, but business is business, and thief-taking's a necessary pleasure some-

times, especially when there's a proper reward offered, which makes things agreeable to all parties, you know."

After a few awkward bows, the two Bow Street runners backed themselves out of the room, and went below in hopes of obtaining some clue to their started game, and of instituting such inquiries as they thought proper, followed by Lucas, who had hitherto kept a steady watch outside the door, listening to everything that was said or done. After remaining some little time in earnest conversation with that attentive individual, the officers remounted their horses and rode away; while the careful Lucas, having first inspected the ground under the window by the light of a lantern, searching up and down for the least signs of footmarks, was heard to fasten up the outer doors, chain them and bolt them with his usual caution against thieves, then walk—rather heavily for him—towards the kitchen, to console himself for his disappointment and chagrin by a quiet chat with Sally.

Blakeborough's reflections were of no pleasing character. The very man against whom he had vowed such heavy retribution, and whose recent villany had brought such sorrow and distress on those he so much valued, was now

hiding from the pursuit of justice by his connivance, and in his very house.

Had he betrayed his early friend, or refused to shelter him in his necessity, what a load of care he would have cast off! He would have been relieved from all fear of future extortion, or the disgrace attendant on his association. But that, he felt, would have been a coward's part; and, if possible, he would rather Upton should die in foreign lands, than run the risk of detection upon English ground, when perhaps thinking to obtain mercy for himself, he might have turned round on him, and with his lying and malicious tongue, have heaped unheard-of slander on him, or endeavoured to involve him in a presumed participation of the theft. Their intimate acquaintance, and his once compromised character, would have afforded some grounds for the reception of this belief; and, selfish and unprincipled as he knew Upton to be, Blakeborough was convinced he would take pleasure in making others appear as guilty as himself—more especially if he could relieve himself from any part of his well-merited punishment by so doing. One thing was certain—he must remove him from his present shelter as quickly as possible, and, when once the house was quiet, he would release him from his hiding-

place, and let him seek a refuge somewhere else.

He sat musing, until all within the house, he thought, were fast asleep ; and almost nodded in his chair, waiting for the time to come when he could descend by the secret stair, and relieve himself of the presence of one he had so much reason to hate and be afraid of.

As he thus sat, half-nodding, half-dozing, in his chair, there came a startling sound of heavy blows, and then a hollow and sepulchral sound, as though a door had been burst open, and then again all was quiet. He sat straining his eyes towards the wainscot where the secret bolt was fixed leading to the winding stair ; when all at once there came a heavy foot, followed by a rustling behind the partition, which, in another moment, was thrown open, as Upton burst into the apartment, and stood face to face, fronting Martin Blakeborough with a fierce, scornful look ; who stared at him for a time without the power of speaking, so unexpectedly had Upton started up before him. Had he risen from his grave he could not have been more aghast or terror-struck. At length he said—

“Is that you, Upton, or the devil in your likeness, you spring out on me so like an evil genius?”

“Thank you for the compliment,” cried Upton, with an insolent, bullying air. “But whether devil or only his likeness, Martin Blakeborough ought to be the first to make me welcome.”

“In the name of the bad fortune you have always brought to me, how came you here, and through what infernal agency—since, of your own help, you could never have relieved yourself from where I placed you? I’ll swear I let the bar fall safely home, and yet you have come through that, and the thick door, as though they had been made of lath, and found your way without light, or anything to guide you, but the evil instincts that have always prompted you to come to ruin me.”

“A pretty place it was you left me in!” replied his quondam friend. “A hole not fit to chain a dog in—but good enough, you thought, for me, or for anything else you wanted to put out of the way.”

“Put out of the way; what do you mean?” said Blakeborough, almost shrinking before the sinister eyes and malevolent look of the man who had so lately prayed and sued to him.

“What do I mean?” replied Upton, while he put his arms a-kimbo, and looked at him with a

sneering, mocking expression. "Why, that we meet at last on equal terms, and that my snug gentleman, my high-flown and magnanimous Squire Blakeborough, may shake hands with the greatest cheat and impostor in the land. Ay, you may, for all your big looks. You could turn round upon me, insult me, trample on me, when you thought you had the power, as you did just now, and shut your purse on an old friend, who came to you in his want, because you were too respectable to associate with a 'felon,' as you called me. But times are changed, and Martin Blakeborough shall beg and sue to me, on his knees, if I wish it, crawl, like the snake in the grass he is, and beg Nic Upton's pardon, or I'll hang you, hang you if only for company's sake ; unless you strip yourself to your last guinea, beg, sell, borrow, steal, and all out of love for your dear old friend, Nic Upton."

In spite of the terrible feeling that came over him, at the altered manner of the man who had lately been so abject and debased, Blakeborough still met his danger boldly, and cried, aloud and passionately—

"Are you drunk or mad, you give yourself these airs?"

"Not so mad, but I can make myself under-

stood before a bench of magistrates, and not so drunk but I'll make you tremble in your shoes, and have my revenge on you for all the insolence and browbeating I have borne from you for years past—from you, who always had your part of the spoils, and were cunning enough to keep it to yourself, and when you tumbled into an estate, pretended poverty, though you could fell timber, and sell land for your own purposes, and left me, who had always shared and shared alike with you, to manage as I could, until I was obliged to *extort* money, as you called it, and live, like a poor dependant, on my fine gentleman's bounty. I, as good a man as yourself, and though possessed of twice your wit, obliged to play second best, because you had the luck of it, and yet had not the courage to own yourself for the rogue you are."

"Again, I ask you, what do you mean, and why this sudden change from begging to bullying?"

"Can't you guess? Money! Do you understand that? You shall before long, or I'll teach my prim squire what it is to keep all the cards in his own hand, and not give another a chance of making a trick."

Blakeborough saw there was something at

work in Upton's mind which he almost feared to learn the truth of. Determined to know the worst, he confronted him even more proudly and haughtily than before.

"You are mighty courageous all of a sudden," he cried, "and have left off whining like a girl, to bully like a cut-throat. But be warned, you know my temper, so do not tempt me too far, or I may teach you what it is to thwart, or put yourself in opposition to, me."

Upton looked about the room, as if searching for some weapon, until at last his eye rested upon the open panneling in the wainscot. A feeling of strength and courage came with the sight of it, when once more confronting Blakeborough with an arrogant mien, and speaking in a bantering tone, he said—

"Oh! I know you and your ways of old, but you have played them once too often on me, and now the only chance you have, is by paying me well to induce me to keep a close tongue, and let you sneak about the world a few years longer. I have always had the sneaking part, but it's my turn at the wheel now, and I'll not let it stop until I have drawn a prize. I am your match now, Martin Blakeborough, and can pay you back your own with compound interest."

"I have saved you once," replied Blakeborough, with a feeling of irresolution very different from his former indignation, "do not tempt me to betray you to those men who have been here to seek you. The officers are yet within call, and——"

"Do call them," cried Upton, laughing in insolent derision while he repeated, "call them, and I'll show them as pretty a specimen of a jail-bird as they ever yet had the caging of. You, who can fatten at other men's expense, and gain by other men's loss, as you always did, and do—you, Martin Blakeborough, who hold your head so high. It shall mount higher yet before I have done with you, and people know you for the rogue you are."

The words were hardly out of Upton's lips than Blakeborough appeared to lose all command over himself. Roused into sudden passion by the insolent bravado, and still more insolent words addressed to him, he was in the act of rushing on him, when Upton shouted in his astonished ear, "Who robbed the mail on Hind Head Heath?"

Blakeborough fell away before the words as though a volley had been fired at his breast, and for a brief interval remained gazing at him without the power of thought or motion, while Upton,

noticing the other's confusion and dismay, laughed out a triumphant chuckle, and again repeated, "Who robbed the mail, I say, and let others pay the penalty? Poor Mike Garroway swings in his chains, while the respectable and high-minded Martin Blakeborough, who was the worse thief of the two, kept all the spoils, or put them into others' hands to risk their necks with, while he kept snug at home, and, like a coward as he was, let another man die for him."

It was all plain! all terrible! all true! Upton had obtained possession of his secret while hiding in the vault where he had deposited the evidence of his guilt, and where, but for his yielding towards his early friend, the mail-bags had lain and rotted beyond the possibility of discovery. The certainty of what had taken place no sooner flashed upon him, than he flung himself upon him, and goaded into desperation by the knowledge of his life being at Upton's mercy, fastened on him with a fury that might have soon proved fatal to his antagonist, who trembled in the grasp of the incensed and maddened Blakeborough, when the door was thrown open, and rushing into the apartment the two Bow Street officers seized upon Upton, just as Blakeborough's grip had fastened round his throat.

“A little more,” said the delighted Joe Ketcher, snapping a pair of handcuffs on the Captain, “and you had been choked right off; but there’s a chance for Jack Ketch yet; and if he don’t make the most of it, he’s not the man I take him for. So the five hundred pound is as good as bagged already.”

Untwisting his handkerchief from his throat, and rubbing at his forehead as if he were polishing a table, Joseph puffed and blowed again, excited by his speech, and quite beside himself with the thoughts of his expected wealth. Then, seeing Lucas dodging at his heels, and watching behind him with his sly cunning eyes, afraid to venture an inch further into the room, unless under his immediate shelter and protection, he shouted out, “Oh, you needn’t be afraid, young man; a bargain’s a bargain, and you shall have your share as agreed on. It was your plan, and a good ’un, too, to ride away as a blind, and then come back when we warn’t expected. You are up to a thing or two, I takes it, and you looks as though you’d improve in time, if no misfortune happens to you to stop your advancement in life.”

Without a struggle, almost without a word, Upton suffered himself to be handcuffed. He turned a little paler, perhaps, but that was all.

Then pointing with his fettered hands towards Blakeborough, he cried fiercely, and savagely—

“There is another jail-bird for you, better worth trapping than I am, and one that will pay for keeping, too—a country squire, and a credit to his county, as his ancestors have been before him. If one thief is to be hung, there’s another ready for the same beam, to be turned off with the same batch some fine Monday morning ; and there he is—Martin Blakeborough, who robbed the mail on Hind Head Heath.”

Half stunned and stupified by the turn events had taken, Blakeborough remained for a few moments inactive and at fault. Betrayed by the very man whose life he had endeavoured to preserve, and who through that very attempt at preservation on his part, had discovered the evidence of his guilt in the place he had selected for his safety ; baffled, and uncertain what to do, he stood looking first at one and then the other, the two officers meanwhile staring first at him, then at Upton, while Lucas opened his sly, mischievous eyes wider than ever, as a new light broke in upon him, and he could see his way to greater favour with the Jew, and a better price than ever for his box of plate.

“Lay hold of him !” cried Upton, with savage

spite, "or are you waiting for proof? Hallo! Dick—Dick Coombs!"

A heavy footstep coming from the far end of the room startled them, as they turned in the direction of the sound, while tramping through the aperture in the wainscot came the old gamekeeper, holding in his outstretched hands the mail bags, which without a word he cast into the midst of the astonished group.

Had the ground opened at his feet, Blakeborough could not have looked more astonished or confounded. The hunted Coombs, the man he most dreaded, and whose revengeful spirit had beset him on all sides, was once more upon his track; while the old man fixed his eyes upon him with a wild ferocious glare, and by a kind of fascination kept him there. He did not speak, he only looked, working his fingers all the time as though he would have strangled him, while his breath came and went, labouring with an excitement that almost overpowered him.

In a moment the bags were lifted, the mail plates inspected, and the truth of the charge established to the officers' satisfaction; when Lucas, finding the time was come when he could show his teeth, and that nothing further could be obtained by fawning, or listening at

the door, advanced with an insolent swagger, and said—

“So *he's* the *fourth* man, after all, is he? I always thought he was one of the lot, only I never heard him go out, though it *has* struck me he might have muffled his horse's feet, and now I know he did. Won't Mr. Isaacs make it worth our while if we only find his papers, and give this stuck-up fellow a chance of shaking hands with his old friend, Mr. Garroway, unless he has a mind to go out with a bounce, and throw decanters at the judge and jury as tries him. There is one comfort, Sally shall see *him* tried, if she couldn't the other one, and there may be a chance of an execution after all.”

The officers waited for no more, but seizing Blakeborough, called upon Lucas to assist in the king's name. Their touch had the effect of rousing Blakeborough from the stupor he had been thrown into, when bringing all his latent powers into play, he wrenched himself from their grasp, bounded towards the door, and would have passed without hindrance, had not Lucas thrown himself in his way, only to be dashed sprawling upon the floor; while darting from the room, Blakeborough cleared the stair-case at a bound, rushed through the

open porch, and before the officers could recover from their surprise, had passed beyond their reach.

But however sudden had been his motion, however quick his flight, an avenging spirit followed after in the person of Dick Coombs. Like a bloodhound started on the scent, he rushed out after him, leaped down the staircase, his eyes gleaming, and his white hair streaming from his head, as bounding on the heels of his flying foe the gamekeeper tracked his steps, and hurried after, like a man possessed with but one feeling, one thought, and that thought—revenge.

CHAPTER XI.

FOUND DEAD.

SWOLLEN by the recent rains, the deep, though narrow stream, which through the valley wound its devious course, foamed and gurgled on, its puny circles twisting and turning round about, in ceaseless motion. Along the borders of the stream, overgrown with rushes and wild flowers, where blue-eyed forget-me-not, the scented meadow sweet, and all the bright uncultivated growths that Nature scatters with her bounteous hand to deck the way-side path, along the margin of the puny torrent, the early labourers, passing to their daily work, plodded along, while wreathing from their short clay pipes the white smoke curled, and left a stream of pungent air behind, floating and mingling with the dew of early morning; their way was still along the borders of the stream, and on the path worn on its banks, they paced along to where the half-reaped fields bowed down their golden heads in wavy greeting, while piled upon the stubble-land the yellow

sheaves lay clumped, and heavy in their shocks, waiting the waggons to bear their loads away, and fill the garner with their saving store.

They had yet some way to go, and through the meadow path the men went whistling on to where the upland spread its brown and yellow fields in autumn's patchwork. With their sickles over their shoulders the men walked on, busy with the thoughts of how many roods they would reap that day, and what a time they would have of it at harvest home, or when the earth was clear of all its bulky treasure, how their wives and children would be searching on those yellow fields, gleaning the ears that from the sickle's sweep would fall, swelling the store of careful industry, or enrich the young child's hand with heavy bunches of the golden grain.

They had nearly reached the winding path leading to their work, when, on the borders of the stream, they saw the figure of a man, lying on his back. Was he asleep? or had he fallen down in a fit? As they drew near to the spot, they noticed how the ground was trampled, and how the prostrate figure laid with his legs in the water, while his body rested on the bank. There was no blood near him, yet there he laid as dead and cold as a stone, his blackened and distorted

face upturned, his tongue protruding from his mouth, his eyes wide open, and starting from their sockets. He was dead—dead ! and terrible to look at ! one of his outstretched hands grasping the long grass on which his body rested, the other holding, as in a vice, the torn lappet of a coat.

It was the gamekeeper, Dick Coombs ; but by whom he had been killed, or with whom he had struggled, they hadn't a guess. It could not be Ned Pullen, he had been got rid of long ago, and the country freed from him and his doings for some years to come. Who else, then, could have set upon poor Dick, who lay upon the ground, stiffened and dead, his long white hair twisted and torn, and his old face turned towards heaven, as if to cry for vengeance on his murderer.

Death and murder are quickly spread about, and crowding round to have a last look at the poor old man the neighbours came, then in a mournful procession bore him from the spot. They had kindly words to say of him, and honest tears to shed upon his corpse. The name of poor Dick Coombs had never yet been breathed against, nor could a man bring a slight or a discredit on it, until the squire had stolen his girl away, and brought disgrace and shame upon him.

What would she now say when she should come to know of it, and she not there to gaze on his white face, or take a parting look at her dead father !

The villagers had no fear of his ghost now, and all the tales they had nursed among themselves were set at rest at last. Once laid within the churchyard he would rest in peace, and his spirit would not walk at night, or come tramping down the Quell, to startle them out of their dreams.

Dick Coombs was dead ; and along the watery course they sought for Blakeborough, thinking to find his body drowned, and strangled, too, for it was well known Dick had pursued him, and once within his sturdy grasp the squire would have no chance of shaking him off. The lappet of his coat, which Lucas said he would swear to, was the only clue to the man with whom he had fought, but whether he was drowned, or had escaped, no one could tell ; although they searched for miles along the stream, and dragged it with nets, no trace of Blakeborough could be found ; and when, at last, Dick Coombs was laid within the churchyard clay, and men and women crowded round his grave, a vengeful retribution was called on him who had sent him to his last long home

so sadly and so unprepared ; while, like the first murderer, Blakeborough was still to be a wanderer on the earth, or be made to bear the penalty of his crime, in just atonement for his wrong.

In eager following after Blakeborough, Dick Coombs had hurried on, and overtaking him on the spot where his body had been found, had fought long and savagely. Desperate in his sudden flight, and reckless of all consequences so long as he could escape from the pursuit that followed, Blakeborough turned with incensed fury on the man who had tracked his steps, and who now opposed his sinewy strength to stay his flight. The murderous Coombs, who had shot at him in the wood, stood in the dark and frowning night alone with him upon the borders of the stream he was about to cross, to set its barrier between himself and the hot chase that would soon be up, and searching for him. Dick's hand was on the lappet of his coat, and unless he shook him off, he would be taken. He tried to force him from him, but Coombs clung to him with tenacious strength, and held him in his powerful grip without once slacking in his nervous hold, shouting all the time and hallooing to the men he thought were close behind. With all his power thrown into one mighty effort, Blakeborough drove his

knuckles with choking fury in the old man's throat. Still Coombs did not relax his hold, but with his head thrown back, and his hands still grasping, fought and struggled still, when Blakeborough heaved him backward with a sudden plunge, and as the old man fell he dived into the stream, and crossing its swift current, gained the opposite bank, and without pausing, hurried on upon his midnight flight, through meadows, copses, woods, until he reached the distant country. He was free of Dick Coombs now, and hoped he might yet escape the peril of the law, and that tremendous penalty which ever attends on crime.

Dick never moved; the gurgles were in his throat, and all was over with his hatred and his vengeance, as there he lay stark and stiff upon the borders of the stream; while drooping round him the rushes waved, and rustling in the low night wind moaned out his requiem; their reedy heads bowing and shaking over him, in token of the dead man lying near them.

And not alone had Blakeborough to answer for the evil he had wrought upon the child, the father now had fallen too! and the dark midnight deed cried out for vengeance on him! A double weight of guilt was shadowing over him, to haunt

his waking thoughts, and madden him with dreams of the bad past, and distemper all his future with a dark, impenetrable veil, through which no glimpse of hope could come. Remorse and heavy gloomy care would dog his life to come, the while repentance cried aloud, and busy conscience, with its never-ceasing voice, would tax him with his wrong.

And still through Upton the descending stroke had fallen, since but for him, this crime at least might have been spared, for, shut within the vault, where Coombs had found a shelter too, his searching eye had lit upon the evidence of Blakeborough's guilt. Eager to work his own revenge he had goaded the old man to lend his help ; the thick oak door barred their passage, but with his brawny shoulders placed against it, Coombs had forced the rotted fastenings, and aided by Upton cleared a way up the winding stairs leading to the apartments overhead. Once on them, and the panel gained, the jealous hate of Upton found a ready means of venting itself, and backed by the presence of the watching and revengeful Coombs, his cowardly spirit had gathered courage to encounter even Blakeborough.

His triumph was short-lived ; he had betrayed his friend, but was himself a prisoner, while

Coombs, stimulated by his hatred and revenge, followed after the flying man only to meet his death ; and there the old man rested within the churchyard clay, unmourned, unwept by his absent child, for whose dear loss he had grown crazed, thinking of her betrayer and her shame.

And was this to be the end of Blakeborough's fair state, and of the good name that had come to him through long descents of honourable lineage ; his mother's love, his father's honour, and the reputation of a line of ancestors, all sacrificed and made void to boyish passion, and his early clinging to a false and treacherous friend ? Like a pebble cast into the water, round and round the circles spread, and so round him the evil doings of that man encircled and oppressed him. From folly, tempted into vice, he had proceeded in the career of evil, and now at last, driven from good men's thoughts, and bankrupt in his own esteem, he was flying for his life !

The master gone, and the whole neighbourhood astir from the over-night's exposure, capture, and sad death, Chase House became a scene of wondering visitors and inquiry from busy tongues, that still kept asking on of the untiring Lucas, who had answers for all comers, and could give a heightened colouring of what had taken place, to

suit his spite and busy consequence. "The squire was a thief, a highwayman, and his friends cut-throats and ruffians ; there was not a man among them, he spoke it to his shame, he had not been disgraced by waiting on ; but the nest was broken up at last, thanks to him, and people now might rest at night without locking their doors or having nightmares, as Lucas had had, ever since he lost his position and himself by taking country service."

It was all known, and each one had his tale to tell, of how the mail bags had been found, and how Squire Blakeborough had hidden them in his cellar on the night of the robbery, when he had galloped over Hind Head Hill, and muffling his horse's feet, had led him in and out the stable without being heard by the attentive ears of Lucas, who had not been able to make out who the fourth man was ; but now every one knew it, and how he and Captain Upton had forged on Mr. Dormer, and shared the plunder between them. Nothing was too bad to think or speak of the absent man ; and although some few espoused his cause, and tried to excuse him on the plea that he had been driven into crime by the force of circumstances, there were others who had their tales to tell as well, and told them to suit their own fancies and dislikes.

In lengthy letters to their friends in town the tidings spread, and all the London prints were full of the events that had taken place in that far lying, out of the way place, while tales of Martin Blakeborough and Nicholas Upton were handed round in busy gossip, or in daily tattle. Dick Turpin and Jack Sheppard were common men for heroes; but a country squire and his friend the Captain were highwaymen of a better sort, and quite worthy of respectable society.

With his spectacles bent over his letter, Mr. Pritchard read, then took them off, and wiped the glasses half a dozen times, before he could convince himself he had read the words correctly. Could he have been so deceived, and could his shrewdness have been blinded when he had taken a fancy to the man, who was now painted in such vile characters? Could Martin Blakeborough, whom he had hitherto considered wayward, but not vicious; unfortunate in his friends, but not dishonourable in himself; could he have plotted the undoing of a man who had assisted him in his necessity, and associating himself with one of the worst scoundrels in the land, have helped him to the ready means of forgery and plunder? His eyes grew dim as he thought of this; but this time he did not take his glasses off, nor wipe

them. Resting his bald head within his palm, he sat reflecting and absorbed in painful thought.

"I'll lay my life," he went on, speaking to himself, "this is not his doing ; stopping the mail I can quite understand, and perhaps forgive him too, if he only tried to force from the old Jew thief the papers he had been swindled of, and had no hand in pilfering what did not belong to him ; but this plundering his friend, this sneaking forgery trick is not like him ; he could pistol a man in Hyde Park, but he would never stoop to pick his pocket. He has been drawn into it through the scheming of some double-dealing rogue, my friend in the cap and beard, to wit, whom I would hang without benefit of judge and jury ; and now he is found out in one offence, his friends, of course, give him the credit of what does not belong to him. I am a pretty good reader of men's characters, and if the squire has been mixed up in this abomination, I'll never trust countenances again, that's all. But as matters stand there is no help for it, and I must lay my legal paw upon the estate, in virtue of my client's mortgage, until such time as things right themselves, and I can see my way well out of it.

His valise was soon packed, and before the end of another hour Mr. Pritchard was bustling

about the inn yard, whence the coach was on the point of starting for Portsmouth, and as it bore him towards his destination, he watched the mile stones, counted them one by one as they came in sight, and thought he never saw them set so far apart before, or so difficult to come at. Spite of his love of slow travelling, "and his ease in his inn," he wished, for once, Mr. Palmer himself were on the outside of the coach, with the Postmaster-general by his side, to convince him that eight miles an hour might yet be attempted with good benefit to the public. Never was such a rambling, crawling vehicle. His impatient irritability at last found vent, and unable any longer to control his fretfulness, he startled the sober "insides" by as unprofessional an oath as ever shocked the Lord Chancellor on the Woolsack; then, throwing himself back in his uneasy seat, he relapsed into an abashed silence; and as his glasses wanted polishing, rubbed them with his handkerchief until they were hot and glowing, and the old lady opposite to him had partly recovered from the effects of the oath, and he could fix his twinkling eyes on her again, without fear of the consequences.

It was late before he reached Haslemere, and there was nothing left for it, but another night

under Mrs. Bushell's dimity, and a day's indigestion from such an aldermanic breakfast as he would have to swallow in the morning ; and there the "White Horse" swung upon its hinges, and there was Mrs. Bushell herself standing in the lighted doorway, looking as fresh and blooming as on the morning she had seen John Bushell drive up in his cart, and she was just taking out her last curl.

There was no escape from that buxom dame ; so after supper, with John and Mrs. Bushell in the little bar parlour, which he chose as a convenient place to eat his broiled chicken in, and hear the news at the same time, the lawyer sat more bewildered than ever at the tale he heard, of how the Captain had been concealed by Martin Blakeborough ; how the mail-bags had been found hidden in his cellar, and how Dick Coombs had been murdered.

Spite of the snowy curtains and the lavender-scented sheets, the lawyer tossed and tumbled as on a troubled sea of never-ending ups and downs. Fevered and restless with the cross-questioning he made himself the victim of, he longed for the morning to come, when Mr. Bushell had promised to have Dobbin put to, and drive him up the splendid "lover's lane" he had twitted Blake-

borough about almost the last time he had seen him ; when with or without breakfast, he made up his mind to consult his old friend as early as possible, and decide upon the state of affairs at once.

Full of these resolutions, the lawyer twitched the clothes up to his chin, dug his head into the pillow, and slept until morning.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOX OF PLATE.

DOBBIN was put to, and, with his usual speed, carried the almost frightened lawyer to Hengist Hall ; but not without his breakfast, as with his stomach full of deviled chicken the night before, he had almost made up his mind to. The broiled ham was smoking on the table when he came down stairs, the new laid eggs were creaming in their shells, and, spite of fasting resolutions, the lawyer ate almost as much ham and as many eggs as he had done the time before.

Seated at last behind Dobbin, he had no reason to complain of the milestones now ; they flitted by him like so many undersized ghosts, ashamed of being out all night ; and when the chaise-cart rattled up to the gates of the avenue, Mr. Pritchard puffed out his cheeks, preparatory to blowing off the steam, and wondered what the Court of Chancery would say to such quick driving. If it once made up its mind to go a pace like that, Heaven help the lawyers, provided

Heaven was ever supposed to meddle with them. There would be an end to their business, and suits be run through, without the possibility of refreshers, or the usual accompaniment of necessary costs.

Had there been any previous doubts in Mr. Pritchard's mind, they were soon disposed of, when he listened to the direct information his old friend and family communicated to him as to Blakeborough and his doings. Then, armed with Mr. Dormer's authority he lost no time in proceeding to Chase House, and taking legal possession, in virtue of the mortgage, until it was paid off. The domestics were discharged, with a month's wages to help them on, and the whole establishment brought to a close; but as it was necessary the mansion should be aired, and kept in proper order, the cook was retained as chief custodian, with Sally as the next under her in command, with particular instructions to keep the door closed, and let no one in without an order from Mr. Dormer.

Lucas was dismissed point blank. He had come rubbing his clammy hands, and smiling upon Mr. Pritchard, prepared to tell him all he knew of the squire's roguery and of his own merits, but had only proceeded so far in his story as to how

he had let the officers in on the sly, and how he had attempted to seize his master; then, pointing to his face, showed how black and swollen it was from the print of Blakeborough's knuckles, when the lawyer cut him short, and told him to pack up at once, *without* a month's wages, for a sneaking, double-faced fellow, as he was, who had not scrupled to sell his master for the sake of so much blood-money, and, what was worse, did not even blush at telling it.

"Out with you," said Mr. Pritchard, "bag and baggage, or rather, bundle and box, and don't let me catch your sinister, whitey-brown-looking face here when I come back. And one word at parting: I would rather trust your master, 'thief and scoundrel' as you say he is, near my breeches pocket, than such a worthless, sneaking rascal as you are. As for your wages, you have paid yourself pretty well, I daresay, or your looks go for nothing. If there are any due, you can square accounts out of what you receive for turning informer—a necessary character sometimes, but a hateful one at all times: and now, out with you, for I feel a strange inclination to add to the beauty-spot you have upon your ill-looking face—I do, upon my soul I do."

The lawyer's eyes were twinkling with a most

unpleasant sparkle. Lucas saw them glowing even through his spectacles, and as he had no ambition of appearing before Sally with two black eyes, he quietly backed himself out of the old lawyer's reach, worked himself round until he got to the door, where he contented himself with making a face at Pritchard, who threw his hat at him, disappeared up stairs, locked himself in his room, and began cording his box.

No sooner had Mr. Pritchard turned his back, than Lucas, after watching him out of sight, descended the stairs, carrying in his hand a tied-up bundle, and on his shoulders his treasured box, when Sally, who was going to look after him, met him on the landing, and with tears in her eyes, asked him, "if he was going to take her to London, make an honest woman of her, as he had promised, and introduce her at court?"

Lucas was hardly prepared for this attack upon his feelings, more especially now his box was ready packed, and the contents in a fair way of obtaining a fair price from the Jew, when, as if to add to his uncomferts, the cook came up as a most powerful reinforcement, and stood with her arms akimbo, ready to turn him out. With both hands occupied—the one with his box, the other with his bundle—he could not even make a show

of embracing Sally, but he tried the best next thing, and began whimpering at parting with her, and vowed, "he'd send for her when he had made his fortune, and they could set up a coffee-house under the very nose of the king and queen."

"But won't you take me with you, Ned?" half sobbed Sally.

"Not now, Sarah; I have too much to do, and have so much to carry."

"I can help you, Ned; and we can carry the box between us." Sally laid her hand upon it as she spoke, as if to show she was quite equal to the task, when Lucas started as from the touch of a thief, and cried out, savagely—

"Take your hands away, and don't bother me! Can't you wait, I tell you, till I have made my fortune?"

"Cook's right, and you are a false-swearing, no gentleman, after all. I thought what would come of it, when you sold master for what you could get; and if it wasn't that I have some one better nor you, as is going to marry me right off, and Dick, the wild man, wasn't worth a bushel such as you, I'd scratch your eyes out—that I would."

Sally's blood was up, while Lucas's turned to water, at the sudden torrent of abuse flowing from the lips of the hitherto gentle housemaid, but as

she kept her hands in dutiful subjection, Lucas took heart, and hoping to make his retreat secure, moved to the edge of the outer door, in the full belief that Sally, distracted by her love, would fall down in a swoon, and not grow combative.

The cook, however, had no such yearnings; but with her brawny arms hastened his departure by a sudden push, sending him sprawling out at the door, which she closed and bolted behind him, while both women set up a loud laugh, Sally holding her sides to show how much she enjoyed it, until at last her laughter changed to sobbing, that, in the end, turned into a fit of crying, at which she made almost as much noise as she had done by laughing.

Lucas fell at full length, his box clattering on the ground, while spoons and forks twanged together in the inside, and there were the women laughing and mocking at him all the while. Gathering up his cast-down treasures, he turned his face, livid with rage, towards the door, and opening his lips over his closed teeth, hissed out a muttered curse, and went his way.

With his heavy box still upon his shoulders, the faithful domestic turned his back upon his last place, and full of tender sorrows at parting from the friends with whom he had lived so

long and pleasantly, jogged on his way, straining his utmost strength to keep his box from tumbling. With his bundle in one hand, and his trunk poised upon his shoulder, he had no easy time of it, but toiled along, his knees trembling under him, and his body steaming at every pore, until at last he turned into the Portsmouth road, where he sat upon his box by the wayside, waiting the coming up of the waggon, which was to bear him and his spoils to London. Mounted at last upon the tail-board of the lumbering vehicle, Lucas blessed his lucky stars that fortune had so far favoured him, and now he had such good news for Mr. Isaacs, he thought he might give him double what the spoons were worth, and put him in the way to something worth having. He had made a good beginning at all events, and, seated on the top of his box, he hoped as good an end.

For long and dreary hours he sat perched behind the waggon, not daring to get down or shift his quarters, for fear some thief should have as keen an eye to perquisites as himself, and decamp with what he had collected with so much care. Pinched at last with hunger, and shivering with cold, he gave the waggoner's boy a penny to take his place, while he went to the bar of a

road-side inn, swallowed a mug of ale, stuffed his pockets full of bread and cheese—his eye fastened on his box all the while,—and without loss of time relieved the sentry from his post of honour.

He sat munching his bread and cheese, chuckling with delight, thinking how well he had rid himself of Sally, and hoping the cook might have a fit, and tumble into the fire she would never let him sit near. One way or the other he had made a good thing of it, and now Captain Upton was in safe keeping he should soon have his share of the reward which the officers, whom he was to find in Bow Street, had promised him. He had no great fancy for the locality, or to come under the inspection of the inquisitive eyes he might happen to meet there, in asking for them ; but two years had elapsed since he left service as under-footman with a heavy parcel under his arm, and had left the street-door open, not wishing to disturb the Duke by banging it behind him ; but as no great stir had been made about the robbery, and as no reward had been offered, the officers might not have heard of it ; but there were five hundred pounds for Captain Upton, and he would have his share of it, and snap his fingers at him outside the debtor's door at Newgate.

Shivering with cold, as the dark night fell

upon him, travelling at the slow jogging rate at which the waggon bumped along, Lucas began at last to droop his eyes, and doze upon the slippery lid of his box ; thrusting himself a little closer under the cover of the waggon, he put his legs inside, rested his head upon his trunk, and went to sleep.

But even here his old friend came to him, and sitting on the bread and cheese lying hard and undigested at his chest, oppressed him with its hideous weight. Horsed upon his sleeping form the nightmare rode in all its terrors, and pressing on him, made him moan and groan in mental agony, as he dreamt he saw a tall man creep up to the tail of the slow waggon, and felt him drag his box from under his head. He could not even lift his hands to hinder him, and then the tall man walked away, scattering his shiny thefts all down the road. Starting at last from out of his sleep, he yelled like a maniac, frightening the waggoner, who swore at him when he found it was only a dream, and smacked his whip as a gentle warning to him not to offend in that manner again.

Rumbling at last up the Old Bailey, the waggon bumped along, and deposited its broad four wheels and dusty cover in the yard of the "New

Inn." Refreshing himself by a hasty wash at the pump, and another mumble at his bread and cheese, Lucas hoisted his box, made his way into Fleet Street, and by dint of inquiry was pointed out the direction written on the dirty card he carried, and in the back street leading from the temple, he stumbled at last on the alley up which the old Jew lived. He was rather staggered by the unpromising look of "Waterman's Alley," and could hardly bring himself to believe how any man living up its dingy shade could make it "worth his while," as the Jew had promised.

There was no help for it now, and as it was impossible to be always walking with his box upon his shoulders, he inquired of an ill-looking bargeman, "If he knew where a gentleman of the name of Isaacs lived. Up there?" and he pointed with his finger in the direction of the alley.

"If it's a gen'leman as you means, what's more like a bunch o' rags with a beard stuck on the top on 'em nor anything else," said the bargeman, "you'll find him somewhere's scraping about in the mud for bits o' coal as tumbles out o' the barges. He's not 'ticklar whether they tumbles out or he pulls 'em out, so long as he gets 'em, and if you wants 'un, you had better go and ax for 'un."

Thus mentally refreshed with the enthusiastic description of the bargeman, Lucas began eyeing about, first up the alley, then down the alley, to where the lazy river crept along, laving the black and muddy shore. He looked up at the windows of those red-tiled, dingy houses, and saw how dirty and begrimed they were, as though no careful housemaid, like Sally was, ever plied her busy hand to let the light of heaven stream unchecked by dust or cobweb. He hardly liked trusting his box, even on his own shoulders, up such a place as that; but perhaps Mr. Isaacs had his own reasons for living there, and so long as he made it *worth his while*, what did it matter to him whether he lived in May Fair, or in a garret in the Minories.

Creeping up the narrow staircase he shouldered his way, and after sundry misgivings at the unpromising appearance of the place, knocked at the door of the second-floor landing.

CHAPTER XIII.

MAKING IT WORTH HIS WHILE.

THERE was a low, shuffling sound within, as though something were being put out of sight. After a short pause, the husky voice of Isaacs asked—

“Who’s there?”

“It’s me, if you please, Mr. Isaacs.”

“Who’s me?” was the curt query of the inquiring Isaacs.

“Mr. Lucas, if you please, sir, a gentleman as you knows very well, if you’ll only open the door. Mr. Lucas, as lived with Squire Blakeborough.”

There were no more questions. In another minute the bolt was drawn, and the grimy, unwashed face of Isaacs met him at the opened door with a delighted grin, whilst his gray, cunning eyes twinkled with suppressed joy, when he saw Lucas standing with his box upon the landing.

“Valk in, pray, Mr. Lucas, sorry to keep you vaiting, vvhich a gentleman never should be.

I vas just brushing up my place a bit, and rolling up my bed, ven you knocked. I thought, 'praps, it vas the milk as 'ad come for breakfast; and only to think it vas Mr. Lucas as I kept vaiting all the vhiles, and I not have a guess of it!"

This gracious reception of the old Jew took off the ill impression of the miserable, dirty room, into which Lucas walked with anything but a delighted step. There was the old wooden desk, and a bundle of rags huddled in a corner, which, by the help of Isaacs' explanation, he conceived to be the bed he had just rolled up. The flavour of the room was anything but agreeable to the olfactory organs of the precise Lucas, but so long as Isaacs made it worth his while, flavour, dirt, rags, and room, were all one to him.

"Valk in, Mr. Lucas," said the Jew, showing his nasty teeth, and twisting his ugly face into what he supposed to be a smile, "valk in, and make yourself at home, vvhich a gentleman should do ven he comes to see a poor old Jew, vat counts for nothin' to a man as 'as seen the vvorld, and lived in the best of society. It's only them as 'as no breeding, as turns up their noses at a poor man, and von't take things as they are."

"Oh, never mind me," said Lucas, setting his

box upon the floor, and infusing into his air the highest possible amount of condescending dignity he could assume. "It's not what I have been used to ; but never mind, business is one thing, and pleasure another."

"To be sure they is," said the Jew, with another of his diabolical grins, "and it's quite amazin' to hear how some men talk of business, as 'as seen nothin' but pleasure all their lives, as though they understood it. But vat have you got here ? a box ? let me put it out of the way for you."

"No, thank you," cried Lucas, rather hurriedly, as the Jew bent towards it with his hands, "it will do where it is, for the present ; and as there is only one chair, and that's a stool, I can sit on it while we talk matters over."

"To be sure you can," said Isaacs ; "how kind of you to think of it ; but draw it a little nearer, or p'raps, as its heavy, I can help you."

Again the Jew stooped, and again Lucas said, "No, thank you," sat himself down upon the lid, and looked rather uncomfortable.

"Vell, Mr. Lucas," said the Jew, squatting himself on his stool, with one leg bent under him, eyeing the box, and giving his beard a fearful tug, "vat can I do for you ?"

“A good deal, if you please, Mr. Isaacs, and we’ll come to business as soon as you like, if it’s quite agreeable to you, and you have nothing else to do. You have heard, of course, all about what has been going on in our parts, and had the letter I wrote to you, as soon as it was found out what a precious rogue master was.”

“It vas wery kind of a gentleman likes you to take so much trouble for a poor old man—von, too, as ’as nothin’ to pay for it vith.”

This was rather a knock down to Lucas, but there was no help for it, so he went on—“If you remember, Mr. Isaacs, when you was down in our parts, you gave me this card, and said you’d ‘make it worth my while if——’”

“Of coorse, I did,” interrupted the Jew, “but, you see, it’s been found out vithout you, and from vat I have heer’d you hadn’t much to do vith it; quite a accident, as I understand from Mr. Ketcher, vho I met in the street, and told me all about it, and you are pretty vell paid already, or vill be, if Nic Upton svings for it, vvhich I hope he vill, for cheating me in the vay he did.”

“What you say is true, Mr. Isaacs, as far as it goes, though you did say you’d ‘make it worth my while,’ for all that.”

“And so I vill, if you’ll only finds my papers; I sveal I vill, and vill buy anything you have to sell at a good price.”

Here the Jew glanced towards the box.

“There wasn’t a scrap left of nothing as we could find, although we searched from one end of the cellar to the other; odd bits of letters, and no end of torn-up papers, but as for wax or parchment——”

“How, then, am I to make it ‘vorth your while,’ young man, vhen you have done nothin’ for me, unless you can find *him* out instead, and I can make him tell me vhere he has hid them, with the fear of the gallows staring him in the face, or make him give fresh vones, to save his neck from being broken.”

“Find him out, Mr. Isaacs?”

“It’s a hundred pound in your pocket, young man, and double the price of vhat you’ve got to sell.”

“That will just suit me, for I have some odd things here, as I have carried all the way to London, as will suit you to a T.”

While Lucas was fumbling for his key, the Jew stood eyeing him with a sidelong glance, but without any further motion towards the box. He knew the lid would soon be open, and in the

meantime kept scraping at the top of his desk with the back of an old knife, as though he had not the slightest interest in what Lucas was about.

Stooping over his treasured store Lucas unlocked the box, and throwing open the lid cried, "There, what do you think of that, Mr. Isaacs?"

"Vell! vot have you got there?" said the Jew, turning his head carelessly from his industrious scraping at his desk. "Oh! some bits of spoons and forks; they're not vorth much, if that's all you've got. There's no getting your money out on 'em no vays."

"But at double the price, Mr. Isaacs——"

"For anything vorth buying, I don't mind; but spoons and forks, vy bless you, there's no getting rid on 'em, at a shilling a ounce."

"But only look at them," said Lucas, holding out a handful of his shining thefts towards the Jew, who hardly condescended to look at them; "I have a few rings and brooches inside as well."

Isaacs took the forks and spoons without a word, chucked them together in his hand as though they were of no consequence to him, and was about returning them to Lucas, when his eyes

fastened on the handles. Turning on him with sudden sharpness he said—

“Vere did you get ’em from?”

“Where did I get ’em from?” cried Lucas, echoing the Jew’s words falteringly.

“Vere did you get ’em from, I say?” bawled Isaacs in still sharper tones, bending his quick eyes on Lucas as if to read him through and through. “Vy, here’s a Dook’s head on some on ’em, and the squire’s crest on the rest.”

Lucas let fall the lid of his box, and with his mouth wide open stared with a frightened expression on the Jew, who, seeing his advantage, rattled the plate in his face and cried—

“Vy, as I am a honest man, if you haven’t been an’ stolen ’em, rings and brooches too, I’ll be bound. So out vith ’em at vonce and let me lock ’em up, afore the officers come, as I expect, on a little bit of business.”

Completely stunned by the abruptness of the Jew’s words and manner, Lucas dug out the trinkets from a corner of his box, and handing them to him with as much fear as if the officers were already at the door, said—

“I thought, Mr. Isaacs, you had a guess where they came from, and didn’t so much mind so long as I could make it worth your while.”

“Vot! vorth my vwhile to be a receiver o’ stolen goods! a ’fence, as the law would hang, draw, and quarter afore I had a chance óf melting ’em and putting ’em out of the vway? Oh! oh! a likely thing vosn’t it? and vwith a Dook’s coronet on the spoons as any vone could svear to, and vwith the officers ’praps already on the stairs.”

“Hide ’em, Mr. Isaacs, hide ’em, put ’em in your desk as you was scraping at, whilst I bolt the door and say you are ill in bed, and can’t be seen. You would not see a poor young man like me locked up, all along of his perquisites and a few spoons, and a thing or two as I picked up, as was of no use? Oh! Mr. Isaacs, have pity on me, don’t tell the officers, don’t, and I’ll go on my knees to you.”

“Go on your knees to the judge as tries you, and see vot he’ll say to you. But here, put your box in here, and ven I goes to look for some bits o’ coal I’ll chuck ’em in the river ven it’s dark, and no vone’s by to see me. Only to think I should have stolen property in the place, and the constables coming as if on purpose to find it out.”

Thrusting his box into a recess in the wall the Jew had thrown open while he spoke, Lucas

shook and trembled as though Joe Ketcher's hand was already on his collar, and the Duke himself standing by to swear to his property. Locked and double locked within the dark recess, the box was at last put out of sight, and Lucas saw his treasured trunk hidden away with even more pleasure than he had looked at it in his room, or sat upon it in the waggon. Sinking at last upon the tumbled-up bed, he wiped his clammy brows, and gazed at Isaacs perched upon his stool, without the power of saying a word.

The Jew glanced at him with his gray, cunning eyes, while an almost imperceptible smile curled up the corners of his mouth when he saw how completely he had foiled and baffled the greedy hopes of the expecting Lucas. But he had other work for him, and now he had him at his mercy he'd make him do it too, without fee or reward.

"I'll tell you vat it is, young man," said the Jew, at last breaking silence. "It's like putting my neck in the 'alter to do vat I have done, trying to save you—that is, if the officers don't come with a search varrant and drags you off to prison. But you don't expect I am going to run these risks for nothin', or treat you like a father as I does, vithout something to make it vorth *my*

while as vell. Now I tell you vat I'll do, because I have taken a fancy to you, though you *are* a horrid thief, and vone as doesn't mind robbing a Dook of his little bit of silver that he's so proud on, and puts his coronet on to make the most of it. But I'll try and save you if I can, and as I wants a young man as I can quite depend on, 'specially vith vat I've got agin him hanging over his head, to go errands for me, and do odd jobs as I can't find time to do myself, I'll board and lodge you, vithout vages of coorse, and put you in a vay of making a honest livelihood. Better nor stealing spoons and forks as don't belong to you, and vat you gets over and above half-a-crown a veek ve'll go snacks in; and in the re-vard, of coorse, as you are to get—mind that—and no trying to cheat me, or out come the spoons and the Dook as owns 'em. You shall take your meals arter me, sveep and dust my room and make my bed, while you can sleep outside under the steps as goes up to the trap-door. You'll find plenty o' odd things to lie on and make yourself snug and comfortable, if the rats vill only leave you alone; and for all this as I does for you out of fatherly feelin', as you are a young man and in danger of your life, you must act as a son

by me, a dutiful von I mean, and von as has my interest always afore him and keeps his eyes vide open to. And now—not that I vants to put you on your trial too soon—there’ll be time enough for that at the Old Bailey,—can you sing?”

The question staggered Lucas. He had been so completely frustrated in all his hoped-for gains he had quite made up his mind to something terrible, and would have jumped at it so long as he had a chance of saving his neck. He sat staring at Isaacs, who looked down on him from his stool, like a cat would on some profligate mouse who had no hole to creep into, shaking his dirty finger like a rod at him all the while he spoke, while Lucas listened to his words in mute subjection. But this question puzzled him, and echoing the Jew’s words he said—

“ Can I sing, Mr. Isaacs?”

“ You looks as if you could. You have a singing face, and must try your luck at that, or sellin’ matches, vich you likes, so long as you do vat I vants. But singin’s the best, it’s more profitable, and no cost out of pocket for the matarials, so long as you keeps your lungs in order and don’t make your throat sore by bawling too loud ; and ven you have changed your new clothes

for some as I vill give you in exchange, you can go amazin' people in the streets and vatchin' 'em as they pass—I don't mean the officers; they vont know you in the clothes you'll vear, if I don't tell 'em; and who knows but you may hit upon that thief of a squire and the men as you told Mr. Ketcher on, as helped him to plunder me. There vos three on 'em, I hear; von on 'em's dead and counts for nothin', but if you have any luck, you may pounce on von o' the others as he gives you a halfpenny for some of your beautiful songs; find vhere he lives, keep vatching and stealing arter him, and 'praps you may get the vhole lot on 'em, hang the squire, and find my bag of papers arter all."

Lucas thought he saw something was to be got out of this, and fell the more readily into the old Jew's plans, provided he would keep him safe from the Bow Street officers, and "make it worth his while" to inform against Blakeborough or his friends—provided he had the chance of meeting them—and hand them over to the well-known mercies of the Jew. He might so be able to make up for the loss of his spoons, which he knew were locked within the concealed opening in the wall, and which he had no chance of getting

even a sight of, placed as he was in the power of his Israelitish friend, who had promised to act as a protector and a father by him. Lucas, in his own mind, resolved to act as a son by *him*, but whether a dutiful one or not, depended upon circumstances, and what he was to get for his obedience.

The bargain was at length struck between them, though not without some qualms on the side of Lucas at parting with his new suit, and disfiguring his personal appearance—of which he had hitherto been justifiably proud—by the frightful things he was called upon to wear, but with his natural dignity of manner, he entertained hopes, in spite of dirty rags and tatters, he should be able to captivate the goodwill of some tender housemaid, cleaning her steps, or better still, some bounteous cook, with a leg of mutton in her hand, listening enraptured to his melodious strains. Anything was better than quarrelling with Mr. Isaacs, who *might* “make it worth *his* while” to hang him, and pocket the spoons for his pains; but with anything like fortune he might yet be able to turn the tables on his new found father, or knock him on the head, if the worst came to the worst.

After a satisfactory meal of coffee-grounds,

boiled in an old saucepan, bread and dripping, and the remains of a red-herring, left half-picked on the Jew's plate, Lucas entered on his first course of studies of son and ballad-singer.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OPPOSITE WINDOW.

FROM early morning until late at night, Nelly kept toiling on in patient struggle with the necessity of her condition, and the hard, painful life she led. There was no hope for her beyond her daily bread, and to overcome the difficulties that met her on every side. The bloom of summer flowers had long since passed away, and she had to turn her hand to anything that could help her on, and keep the fear of starving from herself and from her child. Early and late she toiled, and never rested from her endeavours to better her poor state, or set herself above the want she saw oppressing others, and feared to meet. With the thoughts of the poor-house always in her mind, she tried to see how little she could live upon, hoping to provide against the time she knew would come, when the deep snow should lie on the ground, and she should have coals and many things to buy she could now make a shift to do without.

It would have fared hardly with her but for her true friend Polly, for though that lady had now assumed the dignities of the married state, she was as good and kind as when she worked slop-work at Mr. Gobbins's, and had her Sunday out upon the strength of her twopence-halfpenny a week, chinking in her pocket. For all her responsible and elevated condition, she hadn't ever, even so little a bit of pride about her, though, to be sure, she could not help bringing Mr. Knacker's name forward upon every possible occasion, and although Polly did not mean it, Nelly could not help thinking, at times, that Mr. Knackers had been quite as well left alone, and not trotted out in all the glory of his yellow plush and knock knees in the way he was, as if to remind her of her own deficiency of a lord and master. But then Polly had only been married a few months, and the novelty of the fact had hardly sobered itself down, so that she might be excused a little pardonable vanity, and the attentive eye she always fixed upon the baby's clothes, which she would take up and inspect, with a feeling very different from what Mrs. Waterings had done, and even went so far as to borrow some of them, as a "patten," as she said. In short, Polly was a true, warm-hearted, good-natured girl, and

although she had a temper of her own, and Mr. Knackers had come in for a taste of it more than once, she was always considerate to the necessitous condition of her friend, and from one quarter or another, procured her needlework, which kept her in pretty constant employment, which she still hoped to do until Nelly could find some better occupation.

In the midst of all her many cares, the thoughts of home would steal upon her, and, sitting at her work, her eyes would wander and grow dim, while busy fancy conjured up the humble cottage under the hill, and her poor old father left to his solitary grief. At times she thought she would write to him, and let him know she was alive and well; she could not tell her true position, nor of the child that lay upon her lap, crowing and stretching out its tiny hands, as if to reach at her. What would her father say could he see that child? Would he not curse her, and could she bear to tell him of it? No! she had said good-bye to him in the letter she had left upon the table the night she ran away, and looking down upon the Quell, had bade adieu to him and all.

But though she could not let her father know what she had come to, or break the old man's

heart with the knowledge of her disgrace, she could not help her thoughts wandering to him, and oftentimes she sat with streaming eyes thinking of the gray head she had seen grow white with only guessing at her shame. Bursting into passionate tears, she would sit sobbing and half-choked with grief, until at last she sunk upon her knees, and prayed forgiveness for herself, and for a blessing upon him.

But although she shrank from the thought of what her father would have said of her, she had other feelings towards Blakeborough, and although her pride rebelled against writing to him, or letting him know the want she suffered, or the degradation she endured, she would have given anything that he should know, but not through her, how things had fared with her, and how his child was exposed to daily wants, shut round on all sides as she was by poverty, and the hourly need attendant on her poor, unfriended state; and although she could never have brought her mind to part with it, she felt how wretchedly that child would have to fare, and how poorly it would be provided for, if left dependent solely upon her exertion; and then again she thought, if she should die, what would be its fate, without a protecting hand to shelter it, or place

it above the terrible condition of a parish outcast!

If she could only have satisfied herself he would do something to promote that child's welfare, she would have been contented; for herself, she wanted nothing. She had already suffered wrong enough, and once cast off by his contempt and cruelty, would have died rather than have accepted favour or reward. She wished to see him, perhaps, but that was all; see him, and let him know what she had suffered, and all through him and his un pitying selfishness.

It was with these hopes and fears still pressing on her, she watched more attentively than ever the windows of the opposite house, and the room where Baxter and his friends had taken up their quarters. Intent on discovering if Blakeborough ever went there, and hoping at some chance time or other to see him with his old associates, she had taken the attic she had seen put up to let, and from out her new abode, kept a zealous eye upon the doings of her opposite neighbours.

She had dogged Upton to the house with the green door, and knowing the powerful influence he had at all times exercised over Blakeborough, could not but fear Martin would still hold by the man who had urged him on, not only to cast her

off, for she knew it was his doings, but to all the vicious courses he had fallen into ever since he first became acquainted with him. It might, perhaps, be her good fortune to return him good for evil, and save him from the consequences of what Upton might lead him into, and, should he ever go there, or be in danger through his agency, do him some service, he might yet bless her for.

But days and weeks flew by, and still no glimpse of Blakeborough, although she sat up late, and from her darkened window looked into the room where Upton and his two friends held their busy talk, or watched them stealing home at night; one of them always lagging behind, to see if they were followed, while their drunken comrade, who had tried to lay hold of her in St. Martin's Lane, was always drunk now, and would come staggering through the streets, to go to sleep with his head upon the table, or be carried helplessly to bed by his more sober companions.

And yet with all the sense of wrong pressing about her, she could never quite shut out her early love for Blakeborough; and now she had a chance, as she thought, of seeing him; she longed incessantly for the time to come, when she could feast her eyes with only looking at him, and conjure all the past sad time before her with his

presence. But time flew by, and none but the three men ever sat within that room, or walked abroad at night, muffled and disguised, going and returning in the same cautious way they had ever done.

She knew Upton was there at hide and seek, and since the morning when she had first recognized him in his cap and beard, became convinced in her own mind of his being the same man for whom the reward was offered, which she had seen placarded on the walls, and heard the people talk about. Much as she hated and detested him, she could not bring herself to betray him, and so long as Blakeborough was not involved in the consequences of his crimes, she would leave the punishment to fall on him through some other hand than hers. If she could only get to speak with him, she could, at all events, satisfy herself of many things she wished to know, and might, through him, convey to her betrayer the knowledge of her child's forlorn and unprotected state. That was a duty she owed to the poor babe; but for herself, she would rather have died than have taken anything from him, or allowed her wants to be relieved by him.

At first she thought she could have carried her child in her arms, and begged her bread from

door to door, rather than have stooped to ask a favour at his hands ; but the poor girl's pride was humbled now, and with all her feelings centred in her babe, wished to see it better provided for than she had the power to do herself. She could still want on and struggle on, but her child ! she could not see him want, and therefore made up her mind to speak to Upton the next time she met him, and if possible learn tidings of Martin Blakeborough.

One night, stealing from the opposite house, she saw Upton pass along, this time without the thick-set man to bear him company. He stood looking up and down the narrow street, and then at last walked away in the direction of Tottenham Court Road. She hurried after, and overtaking him when some little distance off, touched him on the shoulder. With a startled expression, Upton quickened his pace in hopes of getting away from her. But bent on speaking to him, Nelly ran after him, and called him by his name. With an intense savagery he turned his blanched face upon her, with a look of inexpressible rage, and when the girl laid her hand upon his arm and tried to stop him, the wrathful coward struck her from him, and with foul words pushed by her. Felled to the ground and maddened by the blow,

and the opprobrious terms he had heaped upon her, Nelly lost all control over herself, and in her sudden passion she rushed after him, seized him by the collar, and screamed wildly to the passers by to lay hold of him.

Flying from pursuit, Upton made good his escape, as he had told Blakeborough; but he had not said how he had struck the poor girl down, or how he had incensed her to betray him.

There were no signs of Upton after this, and Baxter and his companion sat within the room alone, seldom venturing out, but sitting moodily at home, playing at cards to while the time away; or gazing, by way of amusement, into the street, while Nelly watched them from behind the slip of curtain she had fastened to her attic window, to screen her from their observation.

One night, sitting by her flickering light, her eyes aching and dim over the work she had sat so long at, she leant her head within her hands, and thought of all the hopeless days and nights she should have to labour through in such poor drudgery as that, when her child turned in its bed with a wailing cry, startling the young mother from her mournful thoughts to nestle by its side and lull it into sleep again. Its dewy lids were

closed at last, its little hands unclasped, and stealing from the slumbering babe, Nelly looked from her window into the street beneath, and at the opposite room at which she always looked.

Up and down that dull, dark street, she saw the figure of a man upon the opposite side of the way, go pacing to and fro, looking up at the few casements that had lights within them. He crossed the road, and went walking up and down, gazing at the houses on the opposite side, as though he were seeking some particular house, but did not quite know which it was. The movements of the man attracted her attention, and watching him pacing up and down, Nelly saw him cross the street again, and so go searching and gazing on.

Opposite to where she lived, one of those bleary lights was placed that in those days lit up London streets ; and as the man walked under it, with his eyes turned towards the side whence she was looking, she saw a face that turned hers white, and cold as death ! Grasping the window sill, she stood straining her eyes into the darkened street, while her heart beat with painful violence, and she had to press her hand to still its motion and keep its throbbing down, as she had been used to do in days gone by.

The man had reached the other end of the street, and to all eyes but hers would have remained invisible ; but hope and expectation lent their strong aids to help her, and lighting up the way, let her see into the void of darkness and of night, tracing the returning footsteps of the still seeking man. Again he passed under the lamp-post, and again her hand was pressed upon her side as she looked, and saw what she had hoped so long to see.

In another minute her bonnet was tied on, as well as her trembling hands would let her, and hurrying down the stairs, Nelly ran into the street. She heard a door close to as she reached the pavement, and when she looked to where the man had been, he was no longer there. She ran in the direction he had been walking, and back again, but could see nothing of him.

Stupified and trembling with the strong excitement under which she laboured, the poor girl began to think she had conjured up his form, looking with her dim, tired eyes out of her attic window.

In the brief interval whilst she tied her bonnet on and went trembling down the stairs, the man had reached the opposite house at the moment that Baxter, throwing up the window, leant out of

it. At the sound of the opened window, the stranger raised his head, and looking upwards, saw what he was seeking for. The green door was soon thrown open, and as it closed, Nelly put her foot upon the pavement, and the man was gone !

Running first up one side of the street, then the other, she went seeking for him, fearing she had missed him in the dark, and that he was still walking and looking up at the windows, when suddenly a noise of shouting boys, from the corner of the street, startled her, yet made her still look on, thinking the walking figure was, some way or other, connected with it, when she saw a drunken man come staggering along, followed by a troop of boys pulling at his skirts, and laughing at him, as, with unsteady steps, he came to where she stood.

He was the same she had seen with the thick-set man who had given her the money in St. Martin's Lane, and who, she knew, lived opposite to where she lived. The boys were crowding round him, and as the reeling drunkard advanced towards her, he opened his arms and tried to embrace her, when Nelly stepped on one side, and, falling on the ground, Bridgeman lay helpless, while the boys set up a whooping shout, and tried to buffet him.

Thinking to save him further injury, Nelly threw a penny into the midst of the boys, who left the man to scramble for the penny, while two of the biggest quarrelled which should have it, and began fighting, while the other boys looked on, taking different sides, the two combatants scrambling and tumbling together in the gutter, as the drunken man had done before, who, staggering to his legs at last, and sobered a little by the blow he had received, made his way to the house with the green door, and slunk inside.

Disappointed and sick at heart, Nelly retraced her steps, and after lingering for a while about the door in hopes of seeing the stranger come pacing by again, went slowly in, and climbing to her attic, sat herself down and wept. And while her hot tears flowed, her heart kept beating on ; and reproaching herself for her folly at having left the window, wondered where he could have gone to, or if she had indeed seen Blakeborough at all.

Unfastening the few clothes she had about her, she was preparing for bed, when she looked again at the opposite room to see if the drunken man were asleep upon the table as usual, and what the other one was doing, when, to her amazement, she saw Blakeborough sitting and talking with

them. He was there at last, and unconscious of her observation, sat side by side with Baxter, while Bridgeman hung upon his shoulder, and in drunken maudlin wept and laughed by turns. They had some difficulty in persuading him to go to bed, as Nelly saw, and when the door was closed upon him, the two men sat in earnest conversation until their candles were burnt out, and the room was left in darkness.

She had seen him at last—had seen the face she had once pictured to herself as the type of manly beauty—that face which she had watched for from the lattice in the Quell, hanging about its light like the poor moth, only to be tempted to its own destruction. And there he sat, unknowing of the face that bent its eager eyes on his, or of the wide spread arms that opened to embrace him once again, and fold him next her heart.

Her present sorrows were forgotten in the remembrance of her past love, and looking at him, her girlish vanity had been so proud of, she bent towards him still, while her silent lips were parted as if to speak to him, to call him to her, and forgive him all the wrongs he had done her.

Thoughts of home came with the sight of Blakeborough, and all her fleeting recollections passed in array before her, as, one by one, they

rushed up to her mind, then faded away again, to make room for other thoughts and other fancies, that still kept crowding on, as eager memories of the time gone by, and of the hopes and fears that checkered all her girlhood's days, came to her, and narrowed in her life to the poor compass of a single minute.

Shut out at last by sudden darkness, she felt as though she had been looking in some magic glass in which his image had been reflected, only to cheat and mock at her: and as it melted from her view, her streaming eyes and heaving breast alone reminded her of what she had so lately seen! Or, like the recollections of a dream, the memory alone was left of what had been so bright and beautiful; and through that livelong night she tried to conjure back the vision of her mind, and dream again, as she had dreamt in early days, of hope and promise.

Creeping beside her slumbering child, the young mother nestled by it, and sobbed herself at last to sleep.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BAILLAD-SINGER.

SHE woke fevered and unrefreshed. The recollection of the over-night haunted her ; and rising from her bed, Nelly looked across to where she had seen Blakeborough, as if to satisfy herself it was not all a dream.

There was no one in the room—the candlesticks were still upon the table ; but she could discover nothing of Martin or his friends.

She had her daily work to do, and with her many wants pressing about her, could not keep looking from the window all day long. She had a bundle of work to carry home, and leaving, as she was often forced to do, her baby to the care of a girl belonging to the woman of the house, she went to a distant quarter of the town, where her friend Polly had obtained her work ; and, with her bundle in her hand, turned down the street, fearing even to be seen by him she had so often hoped to see. But the window was vacant,

and Nelly went upon her way, unthought of and unobserved.

She had been some hours absent, and was returning home, pleased at the satisfaction she had given, when at the corner of a street a small crowd of people filled up the pavement, while standing in the midst a man was singing; his high-toned voice sighing out the woes of "Sweet Kitty of the Vale," or gentle and disconsolate "Mary Anne."

The man had not a bad voice, but he spoiled it by the affected way he drawled his notes; and Nelly would have walked on, and have taken no notice of him, or his ballads either, but that the crowd blocked up her way, and she had to turn a little on one side to get along. The man at this minute strained his voice to a most alarming pitch, and glancing at him, his features struck her with a sudden recollection of a face she knew;—for Lucas had a face to be remembered. Pausing in her walk, she looked and looked at him, fixing her eyes upon him, and staring at him.

The ballad-singer took no notice of her at first; for a bouncing wench was hanging half in, half out of a window, with her duster in her hand, listening to the woes of "Kitty." Lucas had his eyes turned to her, in hopes of an invitation to

supper, though every now and then he glanced at the passers-by, or stooped to pick up a stray half-penny, as it fell jingling at his feet.

Nelly kept gazing on, and although confounded as she was by his change of dress and occupation, felt sure it could be no other than Mr. Lucas, who had lived with Squire Blakeborough. She was sure of it: she had seen him too often to be deceived; she had a strong dislike to him too; and that, perhaps, sharpened her woman's senses; for he had tried, in his own sly quiet way, to coax her into a fancy for him, and made eyes at her when delivering his master's letters, or when he met her near the house.

The girl left off idling at the window, and shaking out her duster, went on cleaning, and singing out the woes of "Kitty of the Vale," almost as loudly, and certainly in much better tune, than Lucas himself had done. The tender griefs of "Kitty" were brought to a close at last. When parting on their different ways, the crowd went streaming off, and Nelly was left the only observer of the accomplished ballad-singer.

Lucas was in the act of turning down the street, after bestowing a savage glance at the tuneful maid-of-all-work, who sang and rubbed at the same time, indifferent to the attractive

figure whose graceful movements she was blind to, and seemed determined to outsing, when, just as he was turning on his heel, in unutterable disgust, he saw a girl—better looking than the red-cheeked, red-haired housemaid—staring at him out of her large blue eyes. He started, opened his mouth, then looked at her again, as though he had some difficulty in convincing himself as to the fact of its being Nelly—Nelly Coombs, the squire's cast-off girl, whom he had made love to over and over again, but could make nothing of, for all his fascinating condescensions.

With his hands full of ballads, and unconscious of a splash collected at the roadside, he advanced to where she stood, and stepping ankle-deep into the muddy slush, tumbled his ballads in a heap into the gutter, as he cried—

“Is that you, Miss Coombs?”

Nelly made no reply, but stooping, tried to gather up his cast-down treasures.

“Oh, never mind them bits of things, Miss Coombs,” interposed the gallant and gentlemanly Lucas. “It's not worth dirtying your hands to pick 'em up. I have a whole bundle of 'em at home, tucked under my bed for a piller. But who'd have thought of seeing you, Miss Coombs, as I supposed was dead and gone long ago, and

fancied you was your ghost I see'd just now, instead of you."

"I have been here a long time," said Nelly, drawing back a little from the gracious salutation of Lucas, who appeared really pleased to see her, and shook hands with her in spite of her efforts to the contrary.

"And I not to have met you before, looking as I does at everybody. You know of old what a eye I have for a pretty gal, and Miss Coombs over and above all other pretty gals."

"How came you here?" asked Nelly, not noticing the complimentary address of the soft-spoken footman to a Duke.

"Ah! you may say that," replied Lucas; "but walk up here a bit, for them boys are looking at us, and I'll tell you all about it."

As Nelly was anxious to hear news of home, and of the many events that had taken place since her departure, she turned, as Lucas had requested, a little way up a side street, where they could talk more at ease, and away from the busy traffic of the crowded thoroughfare he had taken his stand in, as a likely place to sing his songs, and keep a sharp look out at the same time.

They were no sooner out of sight of the

boys than Lucas smiled most killingly, and said—

“They may say what they will, Miss Coombs, but there’s nothing like a country gal, when you talks of beauty, and has a eye to it. Only to think of seeing you, as I have thought of ever so many times, without once thinking how soon I was to see you, and looking better nor ever.”

Nelly was a little confused at this tremendous compliment,—for such Lucas meant it to be ; but she had often heard him say as much before, and was determined to let him say what he would, so long as she could gain the tidings she desired. At last she asked—

“But what are you doing here, Mr. Lucas, and what made you leave our parts ?”

“You may well make the inquiry, Miss Coombs ; but I found it was of no use buryin’ myself in an outlandish hole like that any longer, where such a thing as decent society wasn’t to be had nohow—nothin’ as I had been used to : and such goings on as went on there, and all along of that lout of a feller as I lived with, as did not know how to treat a gentleman when he see’d him.”

Nelly was rather nettled at this abuse of

Blakeborough, coming from her ill-dressed and out-at-elbow companion, who certainly did not present the idea of very gentlemanly life in his own person—with an old faded coat upon his back, his dress patched and darned to make it hold together, a poor exchange for the new suit he had had at his last half year, which the Jew had taken as a set-off for his own tattered, patched, and threadbare clothes. She checked herself, however, and only asked—

“But what made you leave your place, and come to London?”

“I could not stand it no longer, Miss Nelly, such degradation as I had to put up with from no better nor no worse nor a common highwayman, as would hold a pistol to a man’s head, and pick his pocket with the one he’d got to spare. Why, you opens your eyes, Miss Coombs, as though you know’d nothing about it. Haven’t you heard the news then?”

“News! what news?” cried Nelly, betraying by her earnest manner, her anxiety to be informed of what had taken place in reference to Blakeborough.

“You need not change colour, miss, he’s not taken yet; but if there’s any luck he soon will be, and the two chaps as well as helped

him to rob the mail, and steal Mr. Isaacs' papers."

"Rob the mail!"

"His majesty's own property, as we found the bags and torn letters of, stowed away in his cellar. Ned Pullen was a fool to him, and so you'd have said, miss, if you'd only seen the bump he gave me on the face when I tried to stop him."

"What are you talking of?" exclaimed Nelly, in an agony of fear, "not of Martin Blakeborough?"

"He's not a pleasant subject, miss; but for all that, him and his friends stopped the mail on Hind Head. One of them was hung, a chap as you may have seen, perhaps, up at the house, with a large shirt-frill and a fine red coat; and another ruffian with a chest like a horse, and strong enough for six—a fellow as had the impudence to make his reflections upon me as was his betters, and cast his eye on a young woman as I took notice of."

The truth seemed to flash upon Nelly all at once—the thick-set man, whom she had seen walking arm in arm with Upton and their drunken companion, keeping in doors, and evidently afraid of being seen. They were the men

Lucas described, and Blakeborough, as she knew, was now housed with them, and perhaps hiding from the officers who were searching after him. She was prepared to believe any ill of Upton, but Martin Blakeborough ! could he have associated with highwaymen and thieves, and become a common robber !

The apprehension that he might have done so made her tremble, hearing, for the first time, such fearful things of the man she loved.

“I am not surprised at your taking on, Miss Coombs, in the way you does, seeing you was fond on him once, until he turned you off and took up with the gal at the Hall—a tall, thread-paper of a thing, with no more colour in her face nor a taller candle, and one as I wouldn’t give a snap of the fingers for. But she’s turned *him* off, that’s one good job ; and you can cock up your nose at him now, and ask him how *he* likes being turned off, if it comes to that.”

Nelly was red and white by turns—she did not speak—she only felt the more acutely, and stood confounded with shame and passion before the easy-going Lucas, who went on without pausing.

“And you to turn your back on me—me, as

never know'd what it was to cast a young woman off, or go about robbing, and all along of a feller like that, as will come to the gallows, as his betters have done before him. But never mind, I'll be quits with him before long, for purloining the affections of a gal as I doted on, for 'I *did* dote on you, Miss Coombs, and does still if it comes to that; and when I come into my property, as a friend of mine is keeping for me"—here Lucas looked rather uncomfortable—"I don't so mind if I takes up with you myself. I am a-thinking of a coffee-house, and with Miss Coombs at the bar we'd have lots of gentlemen—real ones—that we could charge as much as we liked to, and live in good society after all."

Still Nelly made no reply, but, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, stood absorbed in thought before the admiring gaze of Lucas.

"I see you are thinking on it; and won't it be a fine thing if we can only ferret him out, get the reward for him—as I hope to do for Mr. Upton—and hang him out of spite?"

Nelly raised her flashing eyes, and met his cold and sinister leer looking her through and through. She had sufficient control over herself *only* to look at him, and mastering her rising passion, said, as calmly as she could—

“ Hang him ?”

“ Out of hand, like his friend Mr. Garroway was ; and we could go, arm in arm, and have a peep at him. It is a sight I have longed to see, only I don't quite like going by myself, for fear I should swoon away, or go on dreaming of it for a month after. Do you ever dream, Miss Coombs ?”

“ Sometimes,” replied Nelly, sadly.

“ How we shall agree, to be sure ! and if *you* only go looking about as well, who knows but you may find him out instead of me, and we can share the reward between us, you know. Only let me get my fingers on it ; I'll take care how Mr. Isaacs ever touches a penny of it.”

“ Mr. Isaacs ?”

“ A friend of mine, and a friend of his, as was, that he stole the bag of papers from ; but that goes for nothing. I should like to rob the old Jew thief myself—that is, if I could bring myself to think of robbin' any one ; for he treats me worse nor a dog, and makes me sleep outside his door, on a old mat, as has nothing left of it but the rope ; and I can't get a bit of covering, though I beg and pray for it, and he with property of mine as would make us rich, and set us up in a coffee-house at once.”

“Whom do you mean?” inquired Nelly, wonderingly.

“A friend of mine, as I told you of, that I am staying with, and who boards me for the half of what I get singing about the streets, in hopes of finding this precious squire, or some of his friends. You don’t suppose a man of my bringing up would dress in this way, and go bawling all day long, if it wasn’t for something I have got in my head, and that’s to pocket the reward; and if I can only get the old Jew’s bag of papers in my hand as well, I’ll teach him what it is to keep my property, and me like a watch-dog only to bark when he wants me. But I have my eye upon him, and he’ll find it rather difficult to shut it up; he’d better mind what he is about, or I may ‘make it worth *his* while,’ in a way he won’t like.”

Nelly was confounded at the fearful tidings that burst so unexpectedly upon her. She had a thousand questions to ask of home, and of her father, but her senses were in a whirl, and she hardly knew which way to turn, or what to think, when Lucas happily relieved her from her uncertainty by the agreeable announcement that he must get his voice in proper order, and try the woes of “Kitty” in another street; “for unless he got enough money to take home, the old

Jew would use him worse nor ever, and give him nothing to eat." But as he had not half told what he had to say, and as Nelly was anxious to gather all the information she could from his babbling, she agreed to meet him in the evening near to where she lived, when she trusted to be able to inform herself of all he had to say ; and now she was aware of the danger Blakeborough was placed in, through the mercenary treachery, and revenge of his discarded servant, she might be able to put him on his guard, and perhaps save him from the peril that awaited him, should Lucas chance to see him, or any of his friends, passing through the streets.

With trembling and uncertain steps Nelly walked one way, while Lucas went the other, turning his head every now and then to look after her retreating figure, and consoling himself with the reflection he had made a conquest, and completely fascinated the pretty, though contemptuous vixen, Miss Nelly Coombs.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEWS OF HOME.

NELLY meanwhile went sadly homeward, thinking of what she had heard, and how she might caution Blakeborough. She could hardly bring herself to believe what Lucas told her was true, or that Martin had stooped so low as to become an associate of thieves and highwaymen. Lucas, she tried to think, might have invented the tale only to vex and mortify her, out of revenge for her having slighted his advances; and, prompted by his malevolence and spite, had forged the fearful news only to render her miserable, make her turn her thoughts from Blakeborough, and bestow them upon himself. But then again, recollecting all she had seen of the men, who, as she knew, were his intimates and companions, by his having sought them in their lodging, and remembering the disreputable stories that had surrounded his early London life, she grew doubtful; and, prompted by her fears to think the worst, became at last convinced that what she had heard was true, and

that Martin Blakeborough was indeed a marked and hunted man, forced to fly from his home, and seek his safety in the secluded street and mean lodging, where his friends and partners in guilt had already found a shelter.

She determined, at all events, to put him on his guard; for, ill as he had used her, and dishonest as his practices had been, she could never quite forget her early love, or that the child she nursed was his. Bound to him for ever by that indissoluble tie, she clung more fondly to him now he was in peril, and with her true woman's heart to prompt her, she forgot his cruelty in her fears and doubtings for his safety.

Full of these anxious thoughts she hastened home, and folding her poor infant closer and closer in her arms, hugged it as though *its* life were periled too; it was even dearer to her now than ever, with the dread upon her of what its father yet might have to encounter. Distracted by her terror, the poor girl wept as though her heart would break.

She would write to him, at all events, and caution him how he went out, or ran the risk of falling under the quick glance of the watching Lucas, who was seeking up and down to find him out; and from whom she hoped to learn more

news at night, and, by humouring his hated love-making, draw him on to tell her all he hoped and all he knew.

The dingy lamps were lit at last, when throwing her poor covering about her, she stole into the street, and hastened on to where she had promised to meet the under-footman. The clock was striking eight, as she reached the corner where she expected him, and stood looking up and down, fancying every man who came in sight was he. One of them stopped to speak to her, and swore as many tender protestations as Lucas himself could have done, but she was deaf to admiration, and, gazing anxiously about her, watched and waited on.

With what different feelings had she waited in her girlish days for Blakeborough ; how she had listened for his footsteps, and thought each minute twenty, that kept him from her sight. Better, she now thought, if she had never watched and waited as she had done, but, keeping in her proper sphere, had matched and mated with some honest man, whose home she might have been a credit to, and shared its comforts, instead of waiting at the corner of that narrow street to see a worthless wretch come creeping by, to tell her of her destroyer's crimes, in hopes of

gathering from him the means of saving him from a disgraceful end.

There she was, standing with her hand pressed to her side, thinking of what she might have been, with her father's blessing always rising over her, of home and happiness. Contrasting all this with her now degraded state, her infant pining for her in her wretched attic, and her betrayer hiding a few streets off, in guilt and terror, never once thinking of the misery he had brought on her, the young girl stood waiting the arrival of Lucas.

He came at last. Hurrying through the dingy street, and out of breath, he accosted her, as well as his exhausted state would let him, with excuses for keeping her waiting, and a thousand soft things all thrown into one. "It was not his fault," he declared, "he was behind his time; a gentleman, as was a gentleman, was always punctual where a lady was in the case; but with the coffee-house, and Nelly in the bar, right before him, he could not help looking after it."

"Only to think, Miss Coombs," gasped the yet breathless lacquey, "of the bit of luck I have had—one as I never thought to get a slice of, half so soon; but as I was standing singing outside a public-house, as I thought there'd be a

chance of getting something out of, with my voice in good order, and 'Mary Anne' a dyin' for her lover, who should come staggering out, drunk as a watchman, with a dozen boys ready to trip him up, but Mr. Bridgeman; or, if it wasn't him, some one as 'ad been his twin, and took to gin, instead of claret. Never was such a likeness—making allowance for his being a friend of the squire's, and sober as a judge, and this one drunk, and a friend only of the boys, who were pelting him to show how fond they was of him."

"A friend of the squire's?" half stammered Nelly.

"I'll swear to him; for if I once fix my eye on a man, I'm not likely to shut it up, without keeping the other wide open, to know him when I sees him again. But Mr. Bridgeman—I'm sure it was him—is more altered than I am, with my clothes locked up by the old Jew vagabond, and instead of drinking claret, as he did the night before the robbery, and wouldn't touch the punch, which Mr. Baxter swallowed a quart of, was as drunk as gin could make him, and smelt of it enough to knock you down. For I got as close as the boys would let me, and would have followed him, only for my appointment with you,

Miss Coombs, which I like better nor a drunken feller, as can't stand on his legs, and is only fit to die in a ditch, like a hog, 'toxicated with eating too many grains."

"But why should you have followed him?" inquired Nelly, with an anxiety that made her tremble.

"Well now, that is a question. To find out where he lives, to be sure; hang the squire and the lot of 'em, and set up a coffee-house out of the reward as is offered for them. But he'll keep till to-morrow, which you wouldn't, for the boys said he was drunk there regular every night, and I gave one of 'em a penny not to push him too hard, for fear he might break his leg, and not be able to come accordin' to custom."

Nelly stood doubting what to do. Fearing she should betray her anxiety by speaking, she let Lucas go on without interruption.

"It was not to be expected I should keep you a-waiting, Miss Coombs, was it? and as I know'd where to fix on him to-morrow night, I thought I'd come straight off, and tell you how near we were to the coffee-house, with you standing behind the bar, and myself a proud man, after all, now you have taken a fancy to me, and turned that feller off, as turned *you* off, you know, as

was too good for him, and has come to your right senses after all."

This was all terrible to Nelly; but she had determined to hear everything he had to say, to bear everything, so long as she could arrive at the information she desired.

The danger now was more immediate than ever. Lucas had discovered Bridgeman in his drunken haunts, and with his usual cunning would trace out Blakeborough, and betray him to the officers of the law. Much as she desired to see and speak to him, she wished him a thousand miles away, hid in deep forests, or sheltered in far-lying lands, so he were removed from where he was, and from the mercenary seeking of his discarded servant.

Listening to all he had to say, she determined to profit by it, and, if possible, thwart him in his treacherous designs.

- "And only to think that you and me should come together, after all, Miss Coombs, in spite of them as tried to set you agin me, 'cos they was jealous of my bringing up and superior education—not that I am proud—but I know what is my due, and how different I am to a set of clodhoppers, as only lived on bacon, and never know'd what it was to smell turtle at a Lord

Mayor's dinner; not that I mean to say I ever tasted it; but the smell's something, and comes next to it, you know. By the way, talking of clodhoppers and bacon, I forgot to tell you when I seed you this morning something as might interest you, about your old vagabond of a father."

"Father!" exclaimed Nelly, with all her natural love mounting to her heart; "poor, poor father! and I to bring disgrace on him, as I have done."

"Oh! bless you, he doesn't mind it now a bit. He did at first, though, and frightened me out of my wits, burning the squire's ricks at night, and climbing up to my winder to peep in at my box. But that's nothing to what I suffered afterwards from the smoke, when I thought I was going to be burnt in my bed every night as I went to sleep."

"But father!" cried Nelly, forgetting everything in her desire to hear of him.

"It was all along of his shooting at the squire he was forced to hide himself, and take up with Ned Pullen and his gang."

"Father shoot at Martin!"

"And couldn't hit him no ways, though he tried hard at it. But when he burnt the cottage

—you remember the old place, don't you? a horrid-looking hole as ever I see'd—the squire swore he'd hang him for it, if he only caught him."

"Have done with these frightful things, and tell me of father; is he alive?"

"Alive!" cried Lucas, echoing her words with the most praiseworthy indifference. "Haven't you heerd the news then?"

"News! what news?" cried Nelly, passionately, and almost beside herself, fearing some dreadful tale was yet to come she trembled to learn the truth of. "What of father? and isn't he alive then, after all, and I not know it, but praying for him every night, and calling to him to forgive me."

"Oh! it's plain you knows nothing about it," resumed the stoical under-footman, "and might never have heerd of it if you hadn't had the pleasure of meeting me. I meant to tell you when I first see you, but forgot all about it in more interesting and agreeable conversation. Your father? why, bless you, old Dick Coombs has been dead these three weeks."

"Dead! father dead!" cried Nelly, wringing her hands, and rocking herself to and fro in an agony of grief, while the hot tears, gushing from

her eyes, fell coursing down her cheeks. "Father! father! and all along of me, who broke your heart, and sent you to your grave cursing and hating me! Oh, father! father!"

"Oh, bless you, it wern't along of you, it was all your dear squire's doings—him as murdered him."

A loud piercing shriek startled the passengers as they walked: hurrying forward, they saw a woman fainting on the ground, and a man standing by her, who, they thought, had been ill-using her, when some one or two of them threatened to serve him in the same way, until he assured them, on the honour of a gentleman, "The young woman had only swooned away because she heerd how her father had been murdered by her sweetheart."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WARNING.

WITHIN a dimly-lighted room two men were sitting, one of them with his face buried in his hands, his elbows leaning on a baize-covered table, while the other sat opposite to him, absorbed in thought; and as the first sitter lifted up his face in answer to some questioning of his companion, the light from the candles in the two brass candlesticks fell upon his pale, anxious features, the untrimmed wicks casting a subdued and half-distinguishable light upon the countenance of Blakeborough, while his friend Baxter, waking from gloomy silence, drew a long breath, and snuffing the thin yellow candles, roused himself to talk again, and startle his companion from the melancholy trance he had fallen into.

Blakeborough turned upon him his sunken eyes for an instant, then sinking them again, lapsed into another gloomy fit of thought, from which, after a time, he roused himself, and glancing round the room, saw how the lines

upon the paper went crossing and re-crossing, until he grew tired of watching them, in his endeavour to trace their never-ending network of party-coloured stripes, while the tall chimney-piece, ornamented with stars and spots, and flying Cupids, tormented him almost as much as it had done Baxter, on the first night he had found a shelter in that room from his old lodgings near St. Martin's Lane.

He had enough to drive the colour from his cheeks, and make him droop his head within his hands, sitting, as he did, an outcast and a felon within the gloomy solitude of that dull, dark room, while hanging over him, like a fiery cloud, his recent deed cast down its shadow on him, like a blood-red mist, at every step he took! Contrasting all his former consequence, his wide-spread rooms, and the comforts of his ancestral house, which he could never hope to venture in again, with that mean dwelling, the utter misery of his abject and forlorn condition fell heavily upon him; and his proud, indomitable temper, subdued at last to the hopelessness of his fortunes, he bowed his head again, while scalding drops gathered about his eyes, and made them red and swollen.

"This is bad, squire, all bad," said Baxter,

breaking the long pause that had come upon their conversation ; “ and the worst is, it can’t be mended, and how to look the difficulty in the face is more than I know of. Not that I am a man to be cast down, or shake in my shoes, when I have the power of helping myself, or a friend, at a push ; but this affair is beyond my reach, and how to face it is more than I know. I can understand meeting a man with his sword against yours, or pistol to pistol ; but this throttling an old man goes against me, and I don’t like it, squire. There is a touch of murder about it that makes me shudder.”

“ Don’t you try to make matters worse than they are, Jack, or drive me more crazy than I am. I tell you again and again, I did not mean to kill him, but he fastened on me like a bloodhound, and with those devils at my heels I had nothing left for it but a halter, or to get rid of him. Old as he was he fought like a tiger, and gripped me as I was never gripped before, or wish to be again. I threw him off, as I told you, heaved him from me with a backward plunge, but never dreamt I had killed him, until I found myself placarded on the walls, and heard my name in every man’s mouth, with the cry of murder coming after it.”

Baxter said nothing in reply, but rising from

his chair, walked up and down the room in painful musing. He was not the man to desert a friend in trouble, whatever might be his offence, but he had a horror of anything that looked like cowardice. This strangling of old Dick Coombs went against his notions of fair fighting, and in spite of his desire of assisting Blakeborough, he had an uncomfortable feeling towards him, which he could not drive away. It looked too much like a murder in his eyes, and the lives of twenty men taken in fair fight weighed as nothing against the death of an old man like that, who had not an equal chance with such an antagonist as Blakeborough.

"Had it been Upton, now," he went on talking, as he walked, "there would have been nothing to say about it; he had strong arms, and plenty of muscle, if he had only heart enough in him to meet a man face to face, and try his best with him. Strangle him and welcome, squire, the first time you catch him, for a white-livered coward as he is. I can hardly think of him, after what you told me, without feeling my fingers closing, and my knuckles starting, as though I had him in my gripe. But he is in four walls now, and unless he has the pluck of Jack Sheppard, is like to keep there, or walk out of it some Monday

morning, the chaplain before him reading the ourial service, with Jack Ketch as his body-guard. So you see there is no chance of setting your foot upon him, squire, or pistoling him, as he deserves."

The mention of Upton's name roused Blakeborough to something like his former action, and then again shrinking with sudden terror from the thought of what his agency had brought upon him, he relapsed again into his former prostrate and melancholy condition, counting up the endless catalogue of evils Upton had brought upon him, ever since the day he first met him at college, and became his college chum.

"This game will never do," interposed Baxter, when he saw how completely his companion was sunk in his despondency; "the run of ill-luck must be met by a bold face, and who knows but old Mother Fortune may have a smile in her eye for you, after all, if you can only get quit of this ugly job. I have yet some guineas left out of the notes you sent me in the packet, which we changed, to our cost, and I'll share and share alike with you; but don't let Bridgeman know it, that fellow would rob his mother's coffin, if he knew where it was, and there was anything in it to get drunk upon; and he'd find a way to the

lining of my waistcoat, like a mouse would to a bit of cheese, if he thought I had kept back some of King George's heads to help us at a pinch. Ill got or well got, it's all one to him, so long as punch is to be had, or gin, to make him drunk with."

"I wonder how he feels with it," said Blakeborough, as a strange speculation came over him with the thought, "and if he forgets the past ! For my part, I think it would drive me mad outright, or I should have tried it long ago."

"Not you, squire ; you have too much of the man in you, to put yourself on a level with a sotting hound like that, who is either snoring, from incapacity to keep his drunken eyelids open—and at times his eyes are terribly drunk indeed—or when he has only had half enough, fancying poor Mike's ghost is at his side, or a Bow Street officer coming to tap him on the shoulder. He is not worth his salt, and will die in a ditch, from an over-dose of gin, if he goes on in this way much longer."

"And the dread of what is past has brought him to this," replied Blakeborough, still under the influence of his strange musing ; "sober as he once was, Tom has taken to the bottle, as some men take to laudanum, which is the better of the

two, perhaps, to drive away thought, and make him dead to recollection. But there is time enough to think of that, when the worst comes to the worst. In the mean time, I must shake myself together, and rouse myself to what I have to do, or I begin to think I shall find myself arm-in-arm with Bridgeman at the bar of a public-house before long, or staggering to bed as drunk and blind as he is."

"Never think of it, squire, but brace your nerves, and let you and I keep ourselves sober, at all events, and try how we can get out of this sad affair. What is past is past, and it is of no use dwelling on it needlessly, unless, indeed, you could try back a little, as I said just now, and amuse yourself with thinking how you might have handed Master Nic over to his old friend, Joe Ketcher, or boxed him up in your old dungeon. I always knew him for a trickster and a profligate, sharp, and long-headed as a fox; but I had no idea he was such a double-dealing vagabond as he has proved to be; and now he has taken it into his head to betray you, he may go the round of his friends, if he only sees a chance of getting off with transportation, by hanging us instead. It is all his doings, squire; and if you have a mind to a hearty curse or two, I'll say, 'Amen!' and

perhaps lend a helping hand myself; for of all the false, ungrateful cowards that ever made a man fall into bad notions of his kind, he is the worst, and I hope the rope that hangs him may break, and half an hour pass before they can get another to string him up with again. The question is not what *has* been, or what might have been avoided?—there is something on that head I wish myself, perhaps—but what is to be done now? You and I, Martin, are both in danger from that affair of the mail; we both ventured for a stake, and it won't do to whine because what we hoped to get slipped through our fingers.”

“Your share, Jack, after all, wasn't worth much; I had all I ventured for, but you came badly off. I have only one regret—that I did not burn the papers, bags and all, instead of hiding them, and sending you the packet, as I did.”

“All's well on that score, squire; you kept your bargain like a man, and ran your risk like a man; but the cards have been against us, and, unfortunately, just now we can't change partners, unless you have a mind to drunken Tom, and a bottle of gin to help you on with him,” said Baxter, with a short chuckle, which sounded strangely enough, when the situation of the two men was taken into consideration.

“If I had only let matters take their course,” Blakeborough went on, almost without noticing the interruption, “and let the Jew work his will on me, all would have been well enough; I should only have had poverty to contend with then, and not this deed of blood to weigh upon my soul, and make me tremble like a leaf. I tell you, Jack, I would rather have wandered like a tramp, begging for a bit of bread, than feel what I feel now, or been starved outright—anything rather than that old man’s life to answer for, or feeling, as I always feel, his hands clinging to me, and dragging me as they did that night. And when I broke from him, and hurried off through by-roads and skulking ways, to find you out, as the only place of shelter I knew of, I hardly dared to look behind me, for fear I should see the white head of the old man flying after me, or hear his feet come tramping after mine. For days and nights I have lain sleepless with only thinking of him, or haunted by the fairy spirit of the oak, have heard its voice still whispering in my ear, and telling me I should not have long to wait.”

Exhausted by his mental suffering, and almost fancying he heard the spirit-voice calling to him as he sat, or felt the old man’s fingers clinging to him still, Blakeborough shrunk as from an unseen

presence, and with the superstition of his childhood strong upon him, gazed fearfully about the room, while Baxter, placing his hand upon his shoulder, tried to cheer him up, and comfort him, in his own rough way, rouse him to look his danger in the face, and prepare to meet it.

At this moment a knock was heard at the room door, when Baxter, motioning Blakeborough to silence, went to open it.

The landlady's slip-shod girl, who did odd things about the house, was standing on the outside, with a letter in her hand, which she handed to Baxter, with an awkward curtsy, and said, "Missus told me to give you that for the tall gentleman as come last night, which the girl from over the way left in the afternoon, only missus put it in her pocket, and forgot all about it till just now."

Baxter took the letter, shut the door, and advancing to the table, laughed in his short, good-humoured way.

"There is hope for you, after all, squire, spite of your troubles ; you see the girls run after you, and hunt you up, almost as much as they did in your own place, though how this one found you out is a puzzle to me, and you not twenty-four hours old in London, unless you met her on the way, and told her where to write to you."

Blakeborough took the letter, and read the superscription, "To M. B."

"She has you there, sure enough, squire," said Baxter, chuckling and laughing at the astounded look of Blakeborough, who turned the letter in his hand, speculating whom it could come from, and who could have written to him in his hiding place.

The letter was fastened with a piece of wax, and well secured from curious prying. It was soon opened, and Blakeborough read aloud the few lines of its contents:—

"You are not safe where you are. Lucas is watching for you, and singing about the streets to find you out. Should I discover anything else I will let you know."

There was no signature, nothing to show from whom the letter came, or give a clue to the writer. The handwriting was evidently disguised, and confounded by the intelligence the letter conveyed, Baxter said—

"I was prepared for something of this sort from Master Nic, and had made up my mind to decamp, before he took it into his head to split upon us. This prying rascal of yours is something new, but he is not the less dangerous because of his insignificance, and with that drunken

fellow Bridgeman always staggering about the streets, he may turn his evil-looking eye on him, and tumble us into Newgate after all. So be prepared, squire, for a sudden start; at daybreak we must be miles from this, unless you wish to be made a song of, and have your last dying speech and confession sold about the streets for a half-penny apiece."

"I am ready to go at once," said Blakeborough. "When you like and where you like, so long as I have you to bear me company; for of all the men who fleeced and fattened on me, there is not one I would trust my safety to, and only to Jack Baxter will I extend the hand of fellowship, in good or evil. He may be blunt, but he is true, and will hold by his friend without flinching."

"Jack's no better than his neighbours; only he has a way of thinking for himself, and acting for himself, which can't be said of a fellow like Bridgeman, who, I will lay my life, is sotting in a public-house over his jorum of punch, little dreaming of the mischief that is brewing, through this eavesdropping scoundrel of yours. I only wish you had broken his neck down the stairs, instead of blinding him with a blow, when he tried to stop you. Sally was too good for him,

by a long way, and looked at me as much as to say she thought so, when I saw the little black-eyed wench peeping at me from behind the door. But here comes Tom lumbering up the stairs, and a good job, too, or he might get us into trouble."

Tumbling and bumping up the stairs, the drunken Bridgeman, charged with an over-dose of gin and punch, came heavily along. Throwing open the room door, he stood staggering at it, unable to advance or go back, his eyes bleared and soddened from the effects of drink, and his whole aspect repulsive and disgusting, when Baxter advanced towards him, steadied him to a chair, into which he thrust him, saying, with a determined resolution, which even Bridgeman, drunk as he was, shrunk from—

"I tell you what, Master Tom, if you have a mind to drink yourself to death, why do it and welcome; but I'll have no more of it while you stay in my company. At daybreak I am off, and if you are not sober enough to keep your legs, you must stop where you are, for I see no fun in risking my neck for such an insatiable sponge as you are. So now go to sleep, and mind, sober at daybreak, or stay behind, dead drunk, until somebody else takes a fancy to you."

“All right, Jack !” hiccuped Bridgeman ;
“only a shilling’s worth of gin, and a shilling’s
worth of punch, and sober as a judge.”

He sat for a while, swaying himself in his
chair, following Baxter about the room with his
eyes, until at last his head fell on his chest, and
he slept long and heavily.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HACKNEY-COACH.

BLAKEBOROUGH had never taken his eyes from the letter, but tracing every word in it, busied himself in useless conjectures as to who could be the writer. There was a certain character about it reminding him of poor cast-off Nelly's hand, whose letters he had often received in days gone by, and the bare notion that it might be sent by her, made him fix his glance yet closer to it.

It was almost madness to suppose she could have written to him, and yet the more he looked at it, the more he thought he could trace out certain letters in it, disguised and altered as they were, that looked like hers. One thing at least was certain—the warning came from someone who wished him well, and drawing his seat close to Baxter, the two men debated long and earnestly as to the route they should take, and to what place they should direct their steps at daybreak, in hopes of avoiding the quick arm of

justice, and of finding a ship to carry them abroad.

"I have no great liking for foreign parts," said Baxter, "or lying my bones in any soil but in the one on which I was born and bred. But needs must when the law drives, and so least said the better. I can shift myself anywhere, but with you, squire, the case is different. You have a fine place, and a fine name to leave behind, and live a rat-in-a-hole kind of life of it, for you must not expect luxuries in America, since that's your mark, but must take to a woodman's axe, and earn your bread before you eat it."

"Anywhere, Jack, so I can get rid of the haunting face of that white-headed old man! I would live in the backwoods all my life, and be content to watch for a glimpse of sunlight through their interminable boughs, so long as I could shut out the recollection of that night, and the deadly grip he fastened on me. I am no child or woman to be startled by dreams, or fancy dangers where there are none, but I am beaten down in heart and spirit while I am here, and long for the time to come—if come it ever will—when I may toil and work, without the fear of dead men's eyes watching me, or be pursued

by superstition, such as you would laugh at, but which I cannot shake off. The belief my mother schooled me in, hovers about me still, and I can no more fly from it, than I can from my own shadow."

"Every man to his thinking, squire, and each man to his own weakness. Mine does not lie in that way; and as to fairies, ghosts, and goblins, I have no more notion of them, than Bridgeman has of how he should run a race with his legs doubling under him, and his head spinning like a teetotum."

A sudden disturbance in the passage of the house, and a hurried footstep coming up the stairs, made them look towards the door, which, in another minute, was thrown open, as Nelly Coombs, followed by the woman of the house, who tried in vain to keep her back, rushed in, and with her bloodshot eyes and colourless face, came madly up to Blakeborough, who started from his chair in nervous trepidation when he saw the wild excitement she was labouring under—her form distended with passion, her fallen hair covering her neck and shoulders in disordered locks, her arms flung out wildly, and her stretched-out hands grasping and clutching at the empty air.

She stood gasping before him, panting with

her sudden haste and distempered fury. Holding her hands, as though she would have snatched him from his grasp, she cried—

“Where’s father?”

Aghast and cowed before the excited passion of the girl, Blakeborough drew back, yet looking at her still, as though he beheld in her the spirit of some fearful thing, that kept his eyes entranced and fastened on her. He had no words to answer her, he could only look!

“What have you done with him, and where have you hid him—him you murdered? and left me and my child to curse at you. Where’s father—father whom you killed?”

There was no escaping from the words that rang out in his ear, like midnight cries of murder and of death; while Nelly, gasping and panting, stood before him, unable to articulate, but stamping with her feet, screaming and stamping by turns, until at last, worn out by the terrible excitement she laboured under, her mounting tears came to her relief, and blinded by them, she burst into a flood of passionate crying.

Baxter had seen her enter with surprise, and, almost as pale as Blakeborough, watched all she did with pitying emotion. The girl’s sufferings struck on a tender chord, and the rough, un-

polished man was almost blinded by his tears as well. But these were soon swept off, and ready to meet all emergencies, he stood watching what was next to come; while Bridgeman, roused from his drunken slumber by the cries of Nelly, opened his eyes with stupified amazement, but without the power of moving from his corner, or doing anything else but look and wonder.

And there the poor girl stood, her gushing tears falling like rain upon the ground, and all her stormy passion melted into fretful sobbing. Conscience-stricken and pale as death, Blakeborough turned on her a contrite and beseeching gaze, while his strong frame shrunk trembling and abashed before that powerless girl, as from a mighty and avenging power. After a struggling conflict with himself, he said—

“Forgive me, Nelly, forgive and pity me, as I hope Heaven will!”

“Forgive!” cried Nelly, roused by his voice to a knowledge of herself and her distress, “forgive! and you can ask it, can you, after what you have done to me—after you turned me off to starve, and left my child to starve as well, for aught you cared, and now you have killed father—killed——” The recollection of his death, and how he had met with it, stopped her further

utterance, while, choking with her tears, her little strength gave way, and she would have fallen had not Baxter held her up.¹

“I swear to you, Nelly, as there is light and the Giver of that light above us, I never meant to do this wrong to him or you. I have hunted for you, sought for you in places where I hoped to find you, but could not. Your misery has been added to my own, and restless nights can testify how much I felt what I had brought on you; but that I would have mended, and have saved you from the want and wretchedness you—and the child you say I have—were made to bear through me. This is all true, and the ever-open Eye that looks upon our acts has read this in my heart and seen my penitence; and watching by that river’s bank—as the Power above must ever watch—knows how I fled away, unstained, as I then thought, by blood, or guilty of your father’s death. And would to Heaven his hand had mastered me, and laid me prostrate by that fatal stream where he was left, like a black spot on the green face of earth, to call the lightning down and brand me as a murderer!”

“And so you are!” said the unexpected voice of Mr. Joe Ketcher, as he peeped in at the door, “and no mistake about the confession. No

offence, your honour, but business is business, and there's no getting on without it."

The sudden entrance of the officer and his companion called a new train of thoughts and feelings up. Blakeborough no sooner recognized the top-boots and wound-up chin of the Bow Street runner than he fell back some paces, ready to break away, as he had done before, or struggle with his captor; while Baxter, startled as he was by their unlooked-for presence, turned a little paler perhaps, but otherwise appeared cool and collected as ever. His jaws were firmly clenched, and a determined look sparkled in his eye, which Mr. Ketcher was a sufficiently practised hand to appreciate; while Nelly turned first to one, then the other, as though conscious of the presence of danger, yet hardly knowing the extent or meaning of it.

"Look you, gentlemen," said Mr. Ketcher, in a most business-like way, "I al'ays like to make things agreeable if I can; but when I can't, I al'ays carry something in my pocket as will make it so."

With these words he produced a brace of pistols from his capacious pockets, while his companion followed suit after his superior, and drew from his breast an equally ominous pair of

weapons, which he held ready for action at the least word from Mr. Ketcher.

“So now you see what may come of it, perhaps you will let me do business pleasantly. Your honour knows my ways of old, and that I always does it like a gentleman. But as I have had a specimen of what you can do, and as Nic Upton—who put us on your scent, and that of your friend there, who don’t seem inclined to behave agreeable by the looks of him—told us what you could both do if you had a chance, we came prepared, as you see, and as there are a brace of slugs in each, perhaps your honour will think better of it, and this gentleman too, who doesn’t know me so well; but when he does, and takes kindly to me, he’ll say Joe Ketcher was the most gentlemanly thief-taker he ever had the pleasure of being handcuffed by.”

“Back with you!” said Blakeborough, fronting the polite Joseph with so determined an air as to induce that functionary to level his pistol at him without more ado. “I’ll go quietly, since there is no help for it; but I’ll not have a finger laid upon me, if you had twenty pistols to point at me.”

“I thought your honour would come round; and as I never lets a gentleman walk to the lock-

up, as is willing to pay for a coach, I have got a hackney waiting for you, and your two friends, of course. And, if you'll excuse the liberty, I and my mate will ride inside as well, with these little pop-guns ready cocked—quite as a matter of form, you know—in case of accident.”

“Look to the door there, Joe!” cried the second runner; when, turning his head, Mr. Ketcher caught sight of Bridgeman in the act of staggering to his legs, in the vain endeavour of sneaking away. Joe quietly levelled one of his pistols at him, which so far terrified the drunken man that he fell back in his chair again, speechless and aghast!

Baxter had been quietly waiting for a chance. He saw one now, and, with a sudden twitch, snatched off the baize cover from the table, throwing down the brass candlesticks, and leaving the room in utter darkness.

The movement was so unexpected, neither Joe Ketcher nor his companion were at all prepared for it. Recovering from their surprise they made a scrambling rush to where their prisoners had stood; then, seizing upon Blakeborough, Joseph held him in an affectionate embrace; while Nelly, screaming with fear, at the apprehension of his danger, clung to him as well,

and rendered futile all his efforts to escape. Gripped by Mr. Ketcher with one hand, while with the other he swore "he'd blow his brains out," Blakeborough resigned himself to his fate, and stood supporting Nelly in his arms, who had fainted away in the confusion, terror, and alarm of the sudden *mêlée*.

Blakeborough was safe enough; while, groping round the room, Mr. Ketcher's companion went searching after Baxter, and calling out for lights. But Baxter was no longer there; while stretched upon the floor, the incapable Bridgeman laid at full length where he had tumbled, in his drunken efforts to escape.

One of the birds had flown, but the others were safe enough; and, fearful of any attempts at rescue or escape, Mr. Ketcher, who had lost a little of his politeness, informed Blakeborough, rather gruffly, that, "If he didn't want an ounce of lead in his brains, he had better be off at once, for he warn't in a humour to stand no nonsense."

Placing Nelly in a chair, and recommending her to the care of the landlady—who, with the candle in her hand, stood bewildered in the midst of the confusion, hardly able to make out what the noise was about, or that her lodgers

were highwaymen, and the two gentlemen who had come to see them, Bow Street runners—he looked at her as she lay in her death-like trance, as though a second murder had been done by him. Pressing her cold, icy hand in both of his, he hung over her, until reminded by Mr. Ketcher, that “the hackney-coach was a catching cold a waiting in the street.”

Politely giving him place downstairs, the officer waited on him with assiduous attention, holding his pistol to his head as a gentle reminder not to try any more tricks with him; leaving his companion to take the less responsible charge of the drunken Bridgeman, and carry him down, he followed closely on the heels of Blakeborough to where the hackney was waiting, which was to convey them to the lock-up.

The coach was drawn up to the curb-stone of that dingy street, when, opening the door, the attentive Mr. Ketcher told his prisoner to “jump in, and be quick about it.” Safely housed at last, he was in the act of following Blakeborough, when, starting from behind the vehicle, a man rushed at him, seized him in his strong, muscular arms, like a practised wrestler got the lock upon him, and threw him with stunning violence upon the ground. The door was closed, the jarvey had

the signal given, and while Baxter ran in one direction, the man flogged his horses in the other, clattering as fast as the hopes of the guinea and their jaded legs could carry him and Blakeborough away.

With his heavy load thrown across his shoulders, the officer came swaying down the staircase, carrying the insensible Bridgeman, who had not yet sufficiently recovered from his intoxication to stand upright; and when he got to the outside, he saw, to his amazement, the prostrate form of the polite Joseph stretched insensible upon the pavement, and in the distance the back of the hackney-coach just as it was turning the corner of the street, rattling along at a most unusual speed.

Flogging and tearing on, the only half-drunk jarvey, who had had the honour of driving Baxter once before, made his way, twisting sharply round curb-stones and corner-posts, only knocking down a blind fiddler and a woman "as would make a pint of getting under the wheels," until he reached the dark highway of the Hampstead Road. Halting at last, he came to a full stop, and looked about as well as his bleary eyes would let him, as though he half expected somebody to meet him there.

He had not long to wait before, breathless with his swift running, Baxter came to where the coach was waiting, threw open the door, and almost dragged out of it the astonished Blakeborough, who could hardly believe that he was free again, and standing in the open road, away from Mr. Joe Ketcher and his brace of slugs.

“Done first-rate!” cried Baxter, handing the jarvey his guinea, and an extra crown “for luck.” “You ought to have your picture taken, and try a run at Newmarket after this—only don’t be too proud, and go talking of it, for fear some of your friends might hear of it. And take my advice—don’t get drunk until you are a good stage from here, and then you can swear you never left Whitechapel all night long.”

The advice was well meant, and quickly followed; for while Baxter, linking his arm in Blakeborough’s, walked off in the direction of Hampstead, jarvey gave a knowing wink—though it was too dark for any one to see it,—slashed his horses on, and never halted until he got to Whitechapel Church, where he pulled up at the nearest public-house, changed the guinea, and swallowed a dram right off, as though he thought he deserved it. Descending from his box before the flavour was well off his tongue, he had another,

and another, until at last he was unable to get down any more, but sat snoring behind his tired horses, who made up their minds to a quiet night of it, and had it too, contrary to all expectation.

Baxter and his companion walked at a sharp pace, and by midnight gained a roadside inn, on the rising ground leading to Hampstead, where he had put up his horse, as a convenient spot in case of an accident like this. Rousing the ostler from his bed, he led his strong beast out, patted and coaxed it as he used to do, while the horse held its head to be stroked, and snorted, by way of showing how pleased it was to see its master once again. His waistcoat had been unripped upon the road, and, after sharing its hidden store with Blakeborough, Baxter mounted his horse, and, with a "God bless you, squire!" and a wave of his hand, gave his horse the rein, and before Blakeborough could look again, he was gone. The distant clatter of a horse's feet alone was heard, and Baxter had departed, never to return.

Blakeborough stood in the middle of the dark road looking in the direction he had gone, and as the sound of horse's hoofs grew less and less, then died away into the distance, he brushed the starting moisture from his eyes, and, with a heavy heart, walked sadly on upon his solitary way.

CHAPTER XIX.

OUT FOR A STROLL.

MR. and MRS. KNACKERS had been out for a stroll ; Mrs. Knackers intent upon the lighted shops, and every now and then calling Mr. Knackers' attention to some unheard-of bargain ticketed in the windows, as something quite out of the common, and cheap as dirt. They had strolled from the awful square, where only carriages of tremendous consequence ever thought of rumbling, with big, bloated coachmen driving horses even fatter than themselves, while footmen, almost as good-looking, and perhaps a little straighter in the legs than Mr. Knackers, hung flauntingly behind, sucking their long, gold-headed canes, frightening the butcher-boys and chimney-sweeps from venturing to lay hold behind, even with one hand. As to climbing up and sitting in state upon the spikes, that was not to be thought of, with such mighty warriors to kick them off and tumble them into the gutter. Even the sight of an occasional lord or two, who actually lived in the

square, had ceased to startle them, and, accustomed as they were to greatness, Mr. and Mrs. Knackers thought a little common life would be a change; and as Mrs. Knackers wanted to buy a yard or two of cambric for a little delicate work she had in hand just then, and as the patterns Nelly had lent her had been cut out in whitey-brown paper, she could take them back at the same time, and as Tottenham Court Road was as good a place as any, she could buy what she wanted, and call upon Nelly, all under one.

Polly had only tried six shops, and tumbled their contents over, without quite making up her mind whether it should be cambric or calico, and was about turning into a seventh when they saw a crowd on the other side of the way, and half-a-dozen people stooping over something on the ground. Despatching Mr. Knackers as an advanced guard, Polly followed after, and with that praiseworthy curiosity belonging to her sex, asked fifty questions of a benighted apple-woman, who proved as ignorant of what had taken place as even Polly herself.

With his long legs thrusting into the midst of the crowd, and his tall head peeping over it, Mr. Knackers saw a woman fainting on the ground,

while the people kept crowding about her, and calling out for "water," which no one ever thought of getting, but quite determined not to let a breath of air come near her, pressed round about the fainting woman, as though a thorough draught would have killed her outright. They had partly propped her up against a lamp-post, when Mr. Knackers, after a look or two to satisfy himself he was not mistaken, communicated the startling fact to his undoubted better-half, that her friend Nelly was lying dead, or dying, on the ground.

Bustling into the midst of the crowd, the little woman elbowed her way, and scattering the people right and left, said, "She know'd her, and would not let a soul lay a hand on her, except herself," while Mr. Knackers was despatched, fast as his long legs would carry him, to the pump for water, the public-house not owning to the article, and, with the top of his cap converted into a basin, brought the necessary supply; then, after bathing her temples, slapping her hands, and all the other known restoratives supposed to be of value in fainting fits, Nelly was restored a little to herself, and, with the assistance of the long arms, and longer legs of Mr. Knackers, was carried to her lodgings, where Polly placed her on the bed, cut her stay-

lace, and busied herself in a variety of those attentions known only to the female sex.

The fainting girl at length opened her eyes ; turning them first on Polly, then on Mr. Knackers, she sighed heavily, then went off into a faint again, which for the next half-hour defied burnt paper, feathers, or vinegar to rouse her out of.

Recovering at last, she cried out wildly, wanted to know where Lucas was, and if her father were not sitting at the foot of her bed. She did nothing else but point to where she thought she saw him, and, in spite of Polly's assurance to the contrary, kept pointing on, and calling to him. Soothed down at last, and sobbing as though her heart were bursting, the poor girl told how her father had been murdered, and who had killed him.

With her head resting on Polly's shoulder, and Mr. Knackers in a state of profound bewilderment, Nelly lay exhausted, and as it was getting late, and the old lady always went to bed at ten o'clock, Polly suggested that Mr. Knackers should go home to the square, while she would stay and sit up with her friend all night.

This proposition was evidently not pleasing

to Mr. Knackers, who did not seem to like the notion of sleeping by himself, and ventured to say as much, greatly to Polly's indignation, until at last Nelly assured her she was better, and could manage well enough by herself.

After a hundred wise precautions against a relapse, and urging her to go to sleep at once, Polly tucked herself under the arm of her liege lord and master, and, with her shopping not even begun, went home again to the awful square, with a promise to come the first thing in the morning, and see how she got on.

Left to herself, Nelly sat crouching on her bed, with her legs drawn under her, as she had sat the night she left the Quell, and full of painful thoughts, and terrible reproaches of herself, sat with one hand twisted in her hair and the other pressing on her side. Her father had been murdered! murdered! while she was there alive to know it, and the man who had killed him was sitting in the room opposite to where she was.

Her thoughts came crowding on her, and starting from her bed, she ran to the window, and looked at the two men talking at the table. There he sat, red-handed in his guilt, and like a murderer hiding from the light of day, while shadowed

against the window his form was faintly thrown by the dim light within, which to her distracted fancy shaped itself into her dead father's likeness, bending over him, and holding up his hand as if to strike him down.

Lashing herself into wild, ungovernable passion, and maddened by her grief, she darted down the stairs, crossed to the opposite house, and, bursting through the open door, ran wildly in, breaking from the woman's grasp, when she tried to hold her, and in another minute stood face to face with Blakeborough. But when the end had come, and he was seized upon to pay the penalty of his crime, the knowledge of his peril drove every other sense away, her girlish love lingered in her still, and father, friends, and home, everything forgotten in his danger, she still clung to him, and would have died herself, to shelter him from harm, or from the very vengeance she herself had called upon him.

Laughing and fainting, laughing and shrieking still, her cries woke up the quiet street, and all night long she remained in hysterics, dashing herself from side to side, her wild and terrible laughter breaking off to maddening shrieks, which left her imbecile and helpless

as her wailing child, which pined and fretted for her; and when Mrs. Knackers came in the morning, and found her in that sad state, she blamed herself for having left her overnight, or stirring from her side, and all to humour that long-legged husband of hers, who did not like sleeping by himself.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CRACK IN THE DOOR.

FINDING the officious crowd rather disposed to quarrel with him, Lucas took himself off in a fit of the sulks, thinking as he went along, what weak creatures women were, and how little put them out. But as he knew where Nelly lived, he could easily find her, and made up his mind to sing "Sweet Mary Anne" under her window the first thing in the morning. If that did not bring her to her senses, nothing would.

St. Bride's Church was striking eleven o'clock when he reached the top of Waterman's Alley, and with hardly any dinner, and nothing but his disappointment for tea and supper, creaked his way softly up the stairs towards the old Jew's room. He was mounting to the second floor landing, when the door opened, and a respectable white-headed old gentleman, followed by a flashily-dressed, evil-looking fellow, came out of the room; while standing at the door, and shading the candle with his hand, the Jew called after them—

“Mind how you goes down, Mr. Clam ; for though you *are* used to all kinds of vays, you might tumble down and break your neck, you know. And don’t you hold by the banisters, Mr. Starlight, ’cos they are rotten, and you might break *your* neck as vell ; that would be a pity, wouldn’t it ? and you a young man as ’as just begun life, vith only a thing or two agin you. Good night, Mr. Clam ; good night, Mr. Starlight, and ven you gets outside, mind the puddle vots agin the step.”

The door was closed, the staircase left in darkness, and as the two men came threading down their cautious way, Lucas shrunk into a corner, holding his breath, and squeezing himself against the wall to make himself as small as possible. As the two men brushed by him, Lucas heard the respectable old gentleman—he spoke so softly, it must have been the old gentleman—say—

“You’ll find Isaacs a very good sort of man when you know him, and always willing to do business at a reasonable rate—quite as reasonable as any one else I know of—considering the danger and the risk he runs ; for the law, as you are aware, punishes the receiver even worse than the thief—the—the gentlemen, I mean, my dear Mr.

Starlight, who drive a business of their own when other people think it time to sleep, that's all. Good night, my dear Mr. Starlight, and pray mind the splash Isaacs spoke of, as it might muddy your new boots. Good night, dear sir; I wish you a very good night."

Not a word was lost on Lucas, although the old gentleman spoke in so low a tone of voice, even Mr. Starlight might have been excused for not catching everything he said; but Lucas had educated himself by constant practice, and could have heard a pin drop upon velvet, if he had once made up his mind to it.

The respectable, pale-faced gentleman moved noiselessly away; while Mr. Starlight went off, to go on in life as he had begun, and with such a friend at court as Lawyer Clam to get him off, and Mr. Isaacs to buy all he stole, there was some hope for him for a year or two at least.

Lucas had a shrewd guess of the particular line of business carried on upstairs, and ceased to wonder at the visits the old Jew received from over-dressed flashmen, reminding him, as near as might be, of Mr. Garroway, with his fine red coat and shirt-frill.

He crept up stairs, and when he reached the second floor landing he heard the lock of the

Jew's door shot home, and the old man shambling about the room. After waiting sufficient time to satisfy Isaacs he had not met his friends upon the stairs, he knocked at the door, when the old Jew asked, as he had done before, "Who's there?" and Lucas said, "It's me, sir."

"Vell!" said the Jew, as soon as he had unbolted and opened the door, "how much have you got? or have you been singing all day with that beautiful voice of yours to bring home three-pence-halfpenny, as you did yesterday?"

"Better nor that, Mr. Isaacs, eighteen-pence, all in coppers."

"Coppers!" mocked the Jew, repeating the word, as though he hated the sound of it. "Vot's the good of coppers to me, ven it's gold and silver as I vants. I should be ashamed of myself if I vas a young man like you, to talk of eighteen-pence, ven a gold vatch or two might be picked up, if you only kept your eyes open."

Lucas knew what the Jew meant well enough; but knowing how he had made it "worth his while" before, he did not feel inclined to run unnecessary risks, only to see the watches locked up as safely as the spoons had been.

"As to my keeping my eyes open, Mr. Isaacs, it's a habit I have got, and I can't shut 'em even

if I tried ; that is, if there's anything worth looking after, and so you'd say if you only knew how I looked at Mr. Bridgeman, as was one of the thieves that stole your bag of papers."

The Jew's face wrinkled with unexpected pleasure, as he cried—"Vere is he to be had ? vere is he ? It's a hundred pound in your pocket, young man, if you only finds out Mr. Martin as vell, and you shall have a supper fit for the Dook as you stole the spoons from."

The mention of the spoons by no means stimulated the under-footman to put the Jew in possession of his secret. He had, moreover, some doubts about the share of the reward he was to get, if it once found its way into Isaacs' pocket. Determined to keep his own counsel, and only tickle the Jew's cupidity and revenge by as much as he thought proper to impart, Lucas replied—

"I don't exactly know where he is just now, for a young woman as is fond of me was waiting at the corner, and as I thought Mr. Bridgeman wasn't of much consequence——"

"Vot ! vith a whole hundred pound ready to go into your pocket, and my bag of papers, perhaps vaiting to be burnt, whilst you go dodging about arter a slut as hasn't a rag to cover her, and only makes a fool on you into the bargain."

“Besides,” said Lucas, without deigning a reply to the Jew’s taunt, “I had been singing all the afternoon, and wanted my supper.”

“Vant, and be hanged to you! and may it choke you ven you gets it!” yelled the Jew savagely, while he took the knife up from his desk, then put it down again, as though he hardly knew what to do with it. But Lucas had a guess, and kept out of harm’s way, while Isaacs looked at him from under his gray rat-like eyes, as though he would have liked to have jobbed it into him.

As there was no supper to be had, and as Lucas had no particular appetite just then to eat it, even if there had been, with only one knife between them, and that clutched in the Jew’s hand, he slunk out of the room, and betaking himself to his mat, under the steps leading to the trap-door, tried to sleep.

He laid for some time shifting about, endeavouring to ease the ropy gridiron under him, and make himself as comfortable as he could; but as he had only half enough things to cover him, he had to double his knees up to his chin, to make the old rug fit over him at all. With his bundle of ballads stuffed under his head for a pillow, he made up his mind to go to sleep, and

dream of Nelly, or think how he should find Mr. Bridgeman, and cheat the Jew out of his share of the reward for betraying him.

After tumbling and tossing some little time, the supperless Lucas fell off to sleep, and, for once, never dreamt at all. There was no fear of indigestion now—no bread and cheese, nor underdone pork, for the nightmare to sit upon; but sleeping peacefully as a tired child, the gentlemanly Lucas snored almost as tunefully as he had sung the day before.

How long he slept he never knew, but streaming across his eyes fell a sudden light; and when he opened them, he saw it coming through a long crack in the Jew's door, which, by some chance, was not closed to, as it had always been when he had awoke before; and there the long bright streak shone out upon the darkness of the landing, falling across his eyes, and waking him out of his first sleep.

The Jew had evidently not gone to bed, although the silent hours of the night had come upon them. St. Bride's Church struck two, as Lucas lay and looked, without the power of keeping his eyes away from the long crack, and longing to peep through it.

Raising himself by slow degrees he sat up-

right, and with noiseless caution lifted himself at last upon his hands and knees. Creeping on them, almost as silently as the stealthy paw of a cat would fall, he looked through the crevice, and there saw the old Jew huddled on his knees as well, crouching before the opened recess in the wall, prying into his treasured box, and at his forks and spoons, piled in a heap within it.

Lucas set his teeth, but never stirred, hardly breathed, for fear of startling the rascally old Jew, who had robbed him of his ill-gotten spoils, while a longing wish came over him to strike him dead, if he could only come at his property again, over which Isaacs spread himself, like an old disreputable hen would over its chickens.

Kneeling, and looking still, he saw how a piece of coal—a portion of the old Jew's pilfering—had fallen into the corner of the door, and prevented its shutting to, so that although the key had been turned, the lock had shot outside the staple instead of in it, and Lucas wondered how the Jew could have been so careless; unless, indeed, the door had been closed in the dark, or by the light of a mere snuff of candle, and so Isaacs had not noticed it; but there the old Jew was, counting his spoons, and gloating over them.

The lid was closed at last, when opening a concealed door in the woodwork, Isaacs laid bare an iron safe, buried in the wall, and hid from observation by the woodwork that shut it in. With slow and cautious hand he turned the lock ; but the click was plain enough to Lucas, who still kept on his hands and knees, watching the motions of the Jew, wishing he might be seized with a fit of apoplexy, and leave his chest for him to have the picking of, and no one by to see him.

With a low creaking sound the door of the iron safe was thrown wide open, when, almost blinded by the glittering contents, Lucas saw, lying in a heap—watches, gold and silver snuff-boxes, plate, and bags of gold. While moving to his wooden desk, and sticking the knife in the lid, as though the recollection of the use he would like to have it put to were still uppermost in his mind, Isaacs took from the inside two watches and a small handful of jewellery, which he deposited in his iron safe ; then holding his candle high above it, looked into it with a delighted smile, chuckling and poring over it.

He closed and double-locked the safe at last, shut up the wooden panel, fitting so closely as not to be perceived from the rest of the wood-

work, and, without taking off his clothes, blew out his light, and went to bed.

Lucas watched him, his heart beating and his eyes glowing. He had seen stored within that iron cave enough to make him rich for life.

Isaacs crept to his bed, and stealing to his own, Lucas sat on his mat, pondering on what he had seen, and wondering if the Jew were fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

AN industrious chimney-sweep was knocking the soot out of a chimney pot, and taking a bird's-eye view of the river and the barges floating with the tide, when he saw a man come out of a trap-door, some few streets off, carrying a box, which he dragged after him over the red house-tops and along the sunken parapets, and climb and struggle on, until he reached some low out-houses jutting almost into the river's mud.

The man was in the act of lowering his box with something he had twisted round it, when a tall stack of chimneys shut him out of sight, and as the boy's eyes were only half filled with soot, and his master was calling up the chimney for him to go down,—thinking perhaps there might be a question of possibility in the case, and that the boy's fat condition might make him stick half way, the lad drew his sooty cap over his face, and left Lucas to lower down his box with a rope made out of his untwisted mat; and so from roof

to roof and outhouse to outhouse pursue his way, until he could make a leap of it into the black and slimy mud, into which the box fell with a slush.

Limping along as well as the sprained ankle he had got in his jump, would let him, he went slowly and painfully away towards the distant neighbourhood of Tottenham Court Road, and the lodging of Nelly Coombs.

There were only a few stragglers in the streets; men going to their work, or with unwashed faces, pale, and staggering from their late debauch at taverns close at hand; while here and there a servant-girl, crossed in love and unable to sleep, was cleaning her steps, in the hopes of brushing away the thoughts of John, who had gone for a soldier; or a charwoman, tired with ringing at the bell, sitting in the doorway, wondering when the copper would be hot, and her arms up to the elbows in soap-suds.

There were other stirrers, too, not from choice, but necessity; and but for his tumble on the pavement, and having to carry Bridgeman to the lock-up—for there was no trusting coaches any more—Mr. Joe Ketcher would have been in bed, side by side with Mrs. Ketcher, snoring in his loudest possible key, deaf to the cries of “Coffee, your honour,” or “Milk below,” which met him

now at every turn, as he walked with his less polite companion, telling him for the hundredth time how the man had jumped out at him in the dark, knocked the breath out of him, and given him the big bump he had upon his head, round which his spotted handkerchief was bound, and folded over a mass of brown paper sopped in vinegar.

Now although Mr. Joseph Ketcher was rather given to politeness, especially when he thought an odd guinea was likely to find its way into his pocket for an extra dose of it, he was not blessed with the best possible of tempers, as his wife knew well enough; and when he met with anything to put him out, was about as savage and ill-conditioned a fellow as ever walked in top-boots. But he was a sharp, active officer, and an especial favourite with the sitting magistrate, who cracked his joke with him when he had been more than usually on the alert, and made the chief clerk roar with laughter, to say nothing of the constables in attendance, when, with his well known tact, he had established his case against a notorious footpad, and the magistrate had little else to do than commit him for trial, and say a smart thing upon the strength of it. But Mr. Ketcher was not always in the jocose mood, and

with his head bumped and swollen like the half of a cricket-ball, and the whole of one side of him black and blue, as though it had not taken the dye properly, he walked along sadly out of sorts, ready to knock down the first apple-woman who offended him.

If it only came to the sitting magistrate's ears or even to the chief clerk's, there would be no end of it. His tumble down would be a standing joke for all the petty constables about the court, who had hitherto made way for him as a man of consequence, and the best thief-taker in the whole town; but with one fellow slipped through his fingers, and another knocking him down, he felt he could never hold his head up again, or show it, covered as it was with a wad of brown paper sopped in vinegar, and his handkerchief twisted round it.

"It's no use swearing, Joe," said his companion, "it was of no fault o' your'n, and if the feller had not taken you unawares——"

"That's the cus of it," replied Joe, with an oath; "a runner like me ought never to be taken unaware, or pitched on the head, like a bad wound up top. To lose the reward too, after all, and only lock up a feller as couldn't run away if he had tried, which he didn't. What will Mr. Moth

say when he hears on it, and the meetin' o' magistrates at Clerkenwell, when they opens Petty Sessions, with the Lord Mayor a sittin' in state, and the sheriffs as is just sworn in? It's enough to make any man swear, with only thinking on it."

And as Mr. Ketcher could not help "thinkin' on it," he swore accordingly, and threatened to take a muffin boy into custody for ringing his bell, and daring to walk on the same side of the street with him.

Starting the muffin boy with one of his most vehement oaths, Joseph and his brother officer crossed Oxford Road, and were on the point of diving into Crown Street, when they saw a man carrying a box, and looking about him with a frightened and suspicious glance. Withdrawing a few paces under an archway, they watched the stealthy steps of the coming man, who, pale as death, and trembling in every joint, came staggering onward, his terror-stricken countenance bedewed with heavy drops, beading his brow with the intensity of fear. There was a look of unutterable horror about him, and when Mr. Ketcher and his companion emerged from the archway, and met him face to face, the box slipped from his hands, while half kneeling on it, the detected Lucas shook and trembled as with a palsy.

Without appearing to notice the terrified expression with which he regarded them, Mr. Ketcher saluted him with one of his most familiar nods, and wished him "Good morning," with as much politeness as if he had been the Bow Street magistrate himself.

"Thank you," stammered Lucas, hardly knowing what he said; "it's a pretty good morning, only rather early for a man as isn't used to getting up so soon."

"You're a travelling ain't you?" asked Mr. Ketcher, glancing at the box, which Lucas began to wish he had left sticking in the mud.

"Only carrying a young woman's box as has taken a fancy to me, 'cos it was too heavy for her, and hackney-coaches ain't as cheap as they might be."

Mr. Ketcher's head gave him a disagreeable twinge at the bare mention of a hackney-coach, when, fixing one of his most official frowns on Lucas, he said—

"The young woman's clothes is wet, I suppose; or p'raps her wages is at the bottom, which makes it heavy."

"Oh! it's light enough," said Lucas, pressing his knees on it, and wishing it at the bottom of the river, tied round Mr. Ketcher's neck.

"You don't happen to have the key on it, do you?" interrupted Mr. Joseph, with one of his blandest smiles.

"Not likely, and the young woman a waiting for it at home."

"Haven't you got one as will fit it?" inquired Joseph, giving his companion a wink to move to the weather side of the shaking Lucas, while he himself got on the other. "A promising young man like you, as is born to rise, and knows a thing or two, as I said once before, *must* have a key about him as will fit anybody's box. It's a part of your duty, young man, or how do you think you are to go on in the way you have begun?"

"It's the young woman's, as I told you," cried Lucas, even more afraid of Mr. Ketcher's touching the box than he had been of Isaacs.

"Heavy as lead!" said Mr. Ketcher, raising the box a little in his hands; "but p'raps it's the wages paid in advance, and a thing or two the young woman's laid her fingers on as she'd no right to, and as you're a young man as I have taken a fancy to, 'cos you're as likely to rise in the world as any one I knows on, I shouldn't like you to be found carrying something you'd no right to; so just hand us the key, will you, and no nonsense."

Mr. Ketcher finished the sentence which he had begun so blandly with as much authority as if he had been the presiding magistrate himself, while his companion seized Lucas by the collar and assisted Mr. Ketcher to take a key from his pocket, which they fitted to the box and began opening it.

“Oh, Mr. Ketcher,” gasped Lucas, who would have fallen upon his knees but for the officer’s hand twisted in his collar; “it’s not me as done it, it’s the young woman I told you on, and if you please I’ll show you where she lives.”

“Watches, plate, and a couple of bags of gold, as I’m a live Bow Street officer,” cried the amazed Joseph, bending over the opened box; “and a sprinkling of jewellery at the top of it. Well, you *are* a young man worth knowing, and one as is sure to rise—ain’t he, Jim?”

“Sartin,” replied his companion, elevating his disengaged hand to the side of his cravat.

“It’s the young woman’s property, and I never see’d a sight of it before, as true as I stand here,” almost shrieked Lucas; while Mr. Ketcher shouldered the box without more ado, and side by side with Lucas walked back again to the lock-up, where he thrust him into a dimly-lighted and pestiferous cell, where he almost tumbled

over a drunken man lying on the ground, sleeping off the fumes of gin and punch.

By twelve o'clock next day the neighbourhood of Waterman's Alley was astir with people crowding round about, fighting and struggling up the narrow way, anxious to get a sight of the dark house, where it was said a man had been murdered.

Lying in a pool of blood with a frightful gash in his throat, and an old knife stuck in his hand, to make it appear he had committed suicide, old Isaacs had been discovered cold and dead. The bolt of his door was shot, but the staple had not been forced away, and who had killed him no one could guess. The fastenings to the street door were as they had been overnight, and with the exception of the lid of his wooden desk thrown wide open, nothing had been disturbed. Yet there the old Jew lay, his face dabbled with blood, and his hand grasping the handle of an old knife with which the murder had been committed.

An old gentleman, and a fellow who looked like a flash man, had been seen leaving his place the overnight, but no notice was taken of that. Strange men were in the habit of going and coming at all hours, some of them with bulged pockets, which were empty when they came down

again. They might be thieves or pickpockets for anything the man of the house knew, or cared. So long as he got his rent he never troubled his head about what his lodgers did, or where they went.

The murdered man lay weltering in his blood, while the doctor stood by his bedside and a posse of officers crowded the room, busy in speculations as to who could have killed him, while spreading to the four quarters of the town the news went round, of how old Isaacs, the Jew money-lender, had been murdered.

Even in the old lock-up the deed of blood was talked of, and when the constable went into the dingy cell where Lucas and Bridgeman sat shivering side by side, he told them how an old Jew had been found with his throat cut, murdered in his sleep, in one of the dirty alleys leading to the Thames.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE OLD HOUND.

BEWILDERED by the unexpected turn events had taken, Blakeborough stood for a few minutes uncertain which way to go or what to do. He had no friend left in the world to whom he could confide his griefs or seek for consolation. With the parting wave of Baxter's hand he felt the last link that bound him to his fellows had been broken; and all ways were now alike to him, since he had sacrificed to his passions and his love of pleasure the sustaining good of a well-conducted life, and he must submit to the unhappiness he had brought upon himself.

Turning at last out of the cheerless road, he struck across the fields sloping on his left, and through the meadow land walked moodily along, and undecided in his course, went anywhere that chance, or accident directed him. Throughout the long hours of the night he still walked on, breaking through hedges, leaping ditches, and keeping in as straight a line as he could guess

from the point he had at first started from. With the sense of freedom strong about him he moved swiftly on, nor ever halted until he was some miles upon his road, and away from the attentive watching of the polite thief-taker. The night was cheerless and unlit by moon or stars, yet on he went avoiding the near neighbourhood of the metropolis through green lanes and straggling paths, leading over Wormwood Scrubbs to Acton.

Here he obtained refreshment at a wayside inn, where some waggoners were watering their horses; then starting with renewed strength he struck across to Chiswick, and hiring a boat to ferry him across the river, pursued his restless flight, his steps still bending, why he hardly knew, in the direction of his distant home.

Unwatched, unheeded, except by the all-seeing Eye above, he still went onwards, his tortured mind fretted and maddened with the heavy load of thought he bore about him; and haunted by the recollection of his ever-present crime, he walked like a man possessed, neither looking to the right hand nor to the left, but with his head bent downward hastened on without an aim, or hope, or end.

Who shall tell the thoughts of that companionless and gloomy man, still toiling on, shun-

ning the towns and villages that skirted his road, or only venturing into them when driven by a sickening want of food to some poor ale-house to snatch a hasty meal, and on again until the day was spent, and night fell on him dark and cheerless as his thoughts?

He was close to the entrance of a market town, and looking up the High Street, stood doubting, hardly daring to venture up it, or seek a night's lodging in one of those old-fashioned inns standing on either side. Their opposing signs almost meeting overhead, the "Red Lion" and the "Blue Dragon," ready to tear each other in pieces for the first incautious traveller who might walk through the only street of that important town.

There were strong drinks to be had, either at the "Red Lion" or the "Blue Dragon," and for a few hours at least he could shut his senses up, and drown his recollection in the fumes of wine. He should not have Nelly's pale face nor her father's always before him then, nor the terrible remembrance of Upton's treachery, nor the knowledge of the wretched consequences his fellowship with him had brought upon him. But when his brain was clear again, and the fumes of drink had past, would not those faces come looking at him again, and

haunting him again? Laudanum could deaden thought as well as wine, perhaps better, and stopping opposite a chemist's shop Blakeborough looked inside, then walked away again, afraid to ask for what he wanted, fearing the man should guess the use he might wish to put it to, and refuse to sell it to him. In nervous indecision he moved away, and at the other end of the High Street he saw another chemist's shop and a man lounging behind the counter. After a turn or two before the window he summoned sufficient courage to walk inside and ask the shopkeeper if he had any laudanum.

The man had seen him pacing up and down, peeping in the window, then walk away, and back again, to look inside again, as though he could not quite make up his mind as to what he wished to do; and when at last he entered the shop and asked for laudanum, the man noticed how pale and haggard his face was, and how fearful he appeared to be, at even asking for it. Looking at his new customer, and wondering what he was going to do with it, the chemist asked "what he wanted laudanum for?"

"I am in the habit of taking it for pains in the head, and generally carry a small phial of it about me."

"Of course you know it is poison?" said the chemist laying strong emphasis on the last word, and looking the stranger full in the face.

"Oh! yes, I know its uses well enough," replied Blakeborough, trying to avoid the searching glance the man fixed on him.

"Sorry I can't oblige you," said the man, scanning the wan, anxious features of his would-be customer more narrowly than ever. "I might get into trouble by it, and you too, if you happened to take an overdose by way of—accident."

"As you please," replied Blakeborough, turning out of the shop; "I can get it somewhere else, I dare say."

The man watched him from the doorway, and down the High Street towards the entrance of the town, then walked behind his counter, and to make sure he procured no laudanum there when his back was turned, took down the bottle from a row of others, locked it in a drawer, and went into the little back parlour, to eat his supper.

The chemist's shop at the other end of the town was still open. After the lapse of a few minutes, Blakeborough came out of it, placing something carefully in his pocket, and with a more careless air than he had been able to assume before, walked into the nearest inn with a secure

and confident step, relieved from all the doubts he had at first experienced, when looking up the straggling, ill-lighted High Street of the market town.

Another day passed by, and another night fell upon the earth. The moonless air was dark and heavy, while a small, misty rain came down, moistening the ground, wetting, as with a heavy dew, the leaves tinted with autumn's changing hues of brown and yellow. The lights faded from cottage windows, as, one by one, the villagers went to bed, and a dark solitude hung over all things, in the night that had now set in, without a single ray from starry lamps to cheer old midnight in his gloom. And there, looming overhead, rose the dark brow of Blackdown Hill, frowning with a more intense and pitchy darkness against the leaden sky.

Descending its rugged slope a man came slowly down the slippery and uncertain path, holding by straggling branches, or clinging on to boughs and stems. After a toiling struggle he gained the lower ground, and without pausing directed his steps to where the shadowless walls of old Chase House rose dimly up, as dark and cheerless as the hill beyond.

There were no lights, no sound of revelry as

there once had been, to startle the dull night, or show how little those within cared for its coming. All now was silent, as though the spirits only of departed men walked in its shade, or glided on from room to room with noiseless motion. And there beyond it, the deserted court-yard, no longer noisy with the sound of yelping hounds, or shouts of eager sportsmen, whom the hopes of the chase had called together, laughing and laying bets as to who should be first in at the death of Reynard, and win his brush.

Climbing the outer gates, the man advanced yet closer to the house, and through the garden paths walked with familiar steps, and paused at last under the window of a room, where, in times gone by, the lights reflected on its panes, burnt out the longest night, until daylight glanced within on drunken riot and intemperate waste. Another window looked towards the garden, but that had not been opened for two years or more. The man stood gazing up at it, as though, from out the shadows of the night, he could have shaped the form of one, whose blissful image rose before him like an angel's presence, lighting the darkness up with unexpected radiance ! Her image still was there—still sat at it, with all a mother's fondness gathered to her eyes, watching him in his boyish

sports, playing and laughing in those garden paths. That window now was dark as well, unlit by loving eyes, uncheered by that fond mother's beaming face.

Beyond the court-yard and the garden where he stood, spread the pleasure grounds of old Chase House, and in the midst the stricken oak, that, in times of yore, had been a fairy haunt, and from whose drooping leaves the chirping voice had come, whispering in his ear, and with its silvery accents, telling him to come away and be at peace! Oh! how he longed for it, and for the time to come when he could shelter in its calm, and be relieved from the oppressing terror of an ever-wakeful conscience! Had he been old and palsied, stricken, as the oak had been, in his decrepitude, by Time's relentless hand, his mind attuned to hope and the hereafter promise, by the knowledge of a well-spent life, he could have lain him down, his head pillowed as on a heaven-tinted cloud, raised and exalted by the recollection of charitable deeds, and never-ending gentleness; but with his strong life full about him, his mind distracted by a thousand cares, he had no time for that calm repentance we are taught to trust to, or to prepare by humbleness of spirit and uplifted prayer for the atonement of the

crimes he had committed ; and yet prepare he must, to meet that end which, sooner or later, comes to all, and woe to him who, tracing back his halting steps through life, through violence and bloodshed, stands unprepared upon the brink of the eternal !

As he thus stood debating with himself, casting up the long account of time ill-spent, of time gone by, and of the time that was yet to come, a low snuffing sound came scenting along the ground. It came nearer and nearer, until with a sudden bound, an old hound sprang towards him, jumping at him, leaping and tearing round and round in joyous circles, then raising its paws upon him, rested them on his breast, and began licking at his hands and face, whining and fondling over him, or went barking off again, leaping and tearing as before, until at last the old hound crouched at its master's feet and set up a delighted bark, which Blakeborough had some difficulty in quieting.

“ Down, old Nep, down, and don't you betray me, as my other friends have done. If they only knew where I was, and had as good a nose as you have, they would hunt me out fast enough, unless you showed your teeth at them, old boy, to let them see I had still one com-

panion left, who would not play me false. It would be a dangerous game to try, wouldn't it, Nep, with you by my side? though your teeth are worn a little, they would hold a scoundrel like Upton, and drag him down for a false-hearted cur as he is."

The delighted hound leaped to its master at the sound of his voice, and rubbing its head against him, tried, in its own dumb way, to express its joy and satisfaction, or kept bounding on, curveting round him, running before him, then back again, watching and waiting on him, as only dogs will watch and wait; until at last Blakeborough set his foot upon the projecting stem of an old pear-tree, trained against the wall, and climbed from branch to branch up to the window of his room, while the hound kept looking at him from below, whining and trying to jump up after him.

Debarred the refuge of his house, whose doors were closed upon him, shutting him out from the shelter of the roof under which he was born, and where his ancient line had held their revels, he was now stealing in it like a thief, climbing with stealthy steps up to the window of his shut-up room, while the hound followed him with its eloquent eyes as he went up and up; and

when the window was thrown open, and he disappeared within it, stretched itself out on the ground below, in patient watching for its master's call, to send him leaping and bounding as before.

Within that lonely room, Blakeborough stood at last, then struck a light, and kindled the small candle he had bought upon his road.

All things were as when he had left them, even the old buffet and the open panel, through which Upton had come from the vaults below, to threaten and at last betray him—those vaults in which he might have barred and shut him up, and kept him a prisoner all his life, with no Dick Coombs to help him, or turned adrift to seek his safety somewhere else. Had he done so, he would not be stealing, as he was, about that silent room, fearing to wake the servants up, who kept watch and ward over the house he was now afraid to venture in, except by stealth, and under the impenetrable shade of night.

As his eyes roamed about the room, and to the portraits on the walls, his glance fixed itself at last upon the grim figure of the founder of his house, painted by some rude limner, in his stiff coat-of-mail linked about his body with plates of steel. He raised the light to look at it more

narrowly, while a superstitious dread came over him, that shut as he was within the solitude of that dark room, the old warrior might start out of his frame, and brain him with his heavy mace, for bringing disgrace upon the house he had created with his strong right hand, defacing his ancient scutcheon and hard-won honours by a deep red stain of blood.

As he stood looking through the half-lit gloom by which he was surrounded, one of the suspending cords broke with a sudden snap, and, swinging from the loosened line, the picture swung grating against the wall.

Blakeborough shuddered, then started back, thinking some unseen hand had cut the rope, and in mute terror watched the ponderous frame go swaying and grating on, hardly daring to take his eyes off it or turn away, fearing the old warrior should leap upon him, and stand before him face to face, rattling in his armour, as grim and stiff as he was there painted.

Rousing himself at last, and nerving himself to the fulfilment of the task he had come to do, he wrote a few hasty lines in pencil in his pocket-book, and placed it upon the table—his eyes still glancing at the half-slung picture on the wall; then advancing towards the shut-up room in

which his mother had died, he stood trembling on the threshold.

Oh ! had that mother's spirit been permitted to hover over him, and with her warning hand to wave him back from what he was about to do, his hopes of meeting her had been more assured ; or had the awful stillness of the room been broken even by a sigh, his heated fancy might have thought his mother watched him from above, and breathed her admonition in his earthly ear. But no sound came ; even the old picture ceased to creak upon the wall, and pendent and aslant, slung motionless upon the fragile cord.

Fitting and turning the key he had always carried with him in the lock, Blakeborough walked inside the chamber, with faltering steps, and fell upon his knees beside that mother's death-bed, where, in early life, he had knelt in infant prayer, and offered up his childish love and worship to his Maker. Had he still prayed and worshipped, clung, as he then clung to his fond mother's teaching, how full of hope and happiness might have been his lot, instead of kneeling, as he now did, asking mercy and forgiveness for a still greater crime to come !

The flickering candle consumed itself away, and but a fading gleam was left of what had made

the darkness light—then shot up in a smoky flare, and all was darkness once again!

Within that house all sound was hushed—a death-like stillness hung about the desolate rooms, while startling the dull ear of night, came the fearful howling of a dog, which all the long night through kept howling on, making the hearers creep yet closer in their beds, shutting their ears to the melancholy moan, presaging death, and the dismal ending of some mortal's life.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DISCOVERY.

THE avenue leading to Hengist Hall was festooned with autumn flowers. At either end an arch of evergreens had been raised for the newly-wedded pair to walk beneath, while girls and children, with their laps full of lavender and sweet-scented herbs, spread out a fragrant carpet down the path. Since daybreak the villagers had been preparing for the marriage of Florence Dormer with the curate, while piled upon the top of Blackdown Hill a wondrous stack of faggots had been heaped to make a bonfire, and let the distant country know what a time they had of it, drinking the health of bride and bridegroom.

Chiming from the village church, the bells rang out their joyous peal, while the dozing vicar opened his eyes, and asked, for the twentieth time, what they were ringing for, and who were going to be married; but as old Saunders was never tired of telling him, and as his master

knew a christening was sure to follow, and one of the "olive branches" likely to be in full bloom before another year was out, old Mr. Marchmont drank his chocolate, and vowed he would be carried in his easy-chair, and be present at the ceremony. His sweetheart Florence was to be married, and as he had already left her a handsome legacy in his will, the good old vicar was bent on offering up his prayers beside the altar for her happiness, and that of the fair-haired boy who had lived to be her husband, whom he had patted on the head at his christening, and who had at last confessed himself the truant son of his old friend, who had lived at the Hall before Mr. Dormer bought the place, and called it after the first Saxon king.

It had been some time coming about, but dozing in his chair one afternoon, with Florence and the new curate talking in whispers by his side, the vicar had fallen into a train of thought of times gone by, and of the old people living at the Hall. The curate's face was so like the boy's who used to prattle to him, and so like the mother and father too, old Mr. Marchmont would look at him at times, dreaming over the days when their son was sent to college, until at last

the old rector beckoned him to his side, called him Cuthbert, asked how his father was, and wondered why he had not been to see him.

The curate turned as if to answer to his name, but meeting the eyes of Florence fixed upon him, hung back confused. A pause ensued, during which his face grew pale and paler, as thoughts of all those household loves came crowding over him ; and when at last the vicar, rousing from his doze, addressed him by his name again, the curate laid his hand in his, and stood in wrapt attention listening to the tales the old man called up to his mind, betraying by his earnest manner, the interest he took whenever that father or that mother's name were mentioned ; until at last, pressed by Florence to confess who he really was, he acknowledged that Philip Stapleton was only another name for Cuthbert Langley, and the house " that was so like her own " no other than the old Hall, where he was born and bred, and would have been the owner of, had not Captain Upton and Mr. Martin enticed him into play, and forced his parents to sacrifice his patrimony to pay his debts, and save him from exposure and disgrace.

Florence had had a perfect faith in the conclusion she had drawn—as perfect as anything

could be—as to who Mr. Stapleton really was; yet had no means of arriving at a more direct and positive knowledge of the fact, but through his own confession, which she had determined not to hasten on, but let matters take their course until the right time brought it about, and she could make her father happy with the certainty of what she had often tried to talk him into a belief of; and had had some difficulty in preventing his propounding the question before, of who, and what he was, point blank to his intended son-in-law, in whose favour he was sufficiently well impressed to wish him descended from Richard Plantagenet himself.

Old Saunders had had a guess of it all along, although he had kept his own counsel, as he always did; but now Mr. Cuthbert had confessed to it, there was no reason for his keeping it a secret any longer, and the next Sunday every parishioner, as he left the church, had a hint given him, and the new curate was greeted with a kinder smile than ever when they met him on his rounds, and “Good morning, Mr. Langley,” was now as familiar to him as “Mr. Stapleton” once had been; while the old tenants, who had often looked at him, puzzling their poor heads at the likeness he bore to the fair boy who had

lived up at the Hall, pressed round him, and many an honest hand had to be shaken, and tales listened to of how they remembered him when a mere child, and how they and their dames had talked of him when sitting in their chimney-corners, and could not help thinking it must be Master Cuthbert after all.

There was no possibility of keeping Mr. Dormer within bounds when he learnt, for the first time, the certain tidings of his future son-in-law being the legitimate descendant of an old family. His doubts were cleared up all at once, and a poor curate with sixty pounds a year, with an old name to his back, was a more desirable match in his eyes, than the richest scion of any modern country family miles about ; he should at last be able to engraft his stock upon one of the old names which had made England what it used to be, and enrich his grandson's blood with some of the best that ever flowed in ancient veins ; and although the edge of his antiquarian pursuits had been a little taken off by recent troubles, the idea of an old Saxon family, or a family springing somehow or other out of one—he did not quite know which,—mingling with his own, resuscitated all his dormant notions, and revived his love of the antique, which for a time at least had given

place to flannel caps and gowns, and the nursing his useless and paralyzed side.

Trooping from the church at Lurgashall, the merry throng came on, the three bells in the steeple clashing and clanging with unusual joy, the tenants shouting, and thirsty villagers all agog for the good cheer they knew was waiting for them, and the strong March beer Mr. Dormer had had tapped to do honour to this marriage time; for on a day like this, if they liked to get drunk they might, and welcome. There were no masks, no mumming now to be spoiled, no knight or wild man to be laid sprawling from an overdose of it, and only headaches for such poor mortals as had heads to ache, with drinking strong March beer.

They had reached the entrance of the avenue—Cuthbert, with his young wife leaning on his arm, walking through the shouting line of men, and bright-eyed girls, and women, to where Mr. Dormer, propped on his crutch, and supported by his old friend, Pritchard, stood at the far end, his kind old face glowing with pride and happiness,—when bustling through the midst, breathless, and pale as fear could make her, Sally came running down the avenue, never once thinking of the fine new cap she had left behind, the confu-

sion she caused, nor of the gloom she was about casting on that day's merriment, but fastened on Mr. Pritchard, and without once pausing in her story, brought it to a close, leaving the lawyer and the bridegroom—who had listened to her tale as well—convinced that something unusual had taken place, and that either thieves had broken into Chase House, or that some terrible catastrophe had happened the overnight.

No time was to be lost, if indeed they were yet in time to prevent what they both feared had taken place already. Leaving Florence to the care of her maids for the short time he promised to be away, the curate hurried off with Mr. Pritchard, to learn the truth of what Sally had reported, with such terrible distinctness, followed by some half-dozen men, who, if a thief were to be taken, might lend a helping hand, and turn him over to the justices.

Sally and the cook had hardly had a wink all night ; they had been awakened out of their first sleep by the barking of a dog, and after that, by a horrible howling, which lasted all the time, and made them afraid to put their heads outside the bed-clothes, fearing they should hear the death-watch ticking, as a sign that either she or the cook was to die, and no one but the dog know a

word about it. But there he kept howling and baying out his dismal cry, as the surest of all possible signs of death coming to some one; and though the cook was a strong-minded woman, and courageous as a lioness in the daylight, she had no more heart than a mouse when once twelve o'clock had struck, and ghosts were supposed to have it all to themselves.

To make matters worse, in the midst of the terrible howling, there came a heavy fall overhead, as though a chest of drawers had tumbled off its legs, and made the old place echo; then all was still again, and nothing came to break the silence of the night but the old hound's moaning. Either the house was tumbling about their ears, or a dozen men at least had broken into it, and were tossing the furniture about, hunting through the rooms in search of plunder.

It was of no use talking of it, neither she nor Sally would have got out of bed for all the world, and did nothing but shake and tremble, fearing at last they should both die of fright, at the ceaseless howling of the dog, who was too old to howl for nothing, and had never done such a thing all the days they could remember.

There they lay, dreading every hour would be their last, or that old Death himself would come,

with his scythe and hour-glass, strip the bed-clothes off with his bony fingers, and grin at them out of that horrible wide mouth of his ; until at last the cook, finding herself in tolerably sound health, and a little more inclined to look Death in the face, after the long time she had been expecting him, put her head out of the bed-clothes, and found, to her great relief, daylight already streaming through the window, and heard the old hound scratching on the outside to be let in.

The cook was dressed in less time than you could talk of it, and opened the door, with a full determination of beating the dog soundly for cheating her with the fear of death all night, and keeping her awake, listening to his horrid howl, when the hound sprung past her, and bounding up the stairs, rushed to the door of the squire's room, and began beating at it with his paws, scratching, and barking to be let in ; and when the door was opened, went yelping round the chamber, then sniffing at the door of the shut-up room, laid himself full length before it, his nose scenting and snuffing at it all the time, and began howling even more dismally than he had done before.

The window was wide open, and on the floor a man's muddy foot had left its print, while, broken from its cord, the old picture lay dashed

and tumbled on the ground, the frame shattered, and the grim portrait bent and doubled up, as though the old warrior had shivered it with his mace, and beat himself to pieces out of spite. There it lay, a torn and crumpled heap, and with its heavy fall, had frightened the cook and Sally, even worse than the baying of the hound, who kept whining at the door, and would not be coaxed or driven from it, but held his mournful guard outside the threshold of that shut-up room.

He laid there all the time Sally ran over to the Hall, while the cook stood outside the porch, telling all she knew to a farm labourer, whom she had called from his work to keep her company; and when at last the curate and Mr. Pritchard arrived, with strong-armed peasants, to search the house, and they went up stairs into the squire's room, they found the old hound still at his post, just as she had left him, who began scratching and leaping against the door more violently than ever, as a sign for them to come and open it.

A pocket-book lay upon the table. Glancing at the few lines written within it, the lawyer changed colour, then moved towards the door of the shut-up room, with nervous trepidation, but found it was fastened on the inside. Their cries and knocking obtaining no answer, they forced

the lock, and broke into the room ; but no sooner had they set foot in it than, recoiling back in terror, they saw the figure of a man lying prostrate on the bed, his body thrown across it, while his knees rested on the floor, as though in the attitude of prayer he had bidden adieu to life, and sunk exhausted to his death.

A sickly smell of laudanum stifled the apartment with its deadly fume, while an empty phial, labelled "Poison," grasped in the man's right hand, showed the deadly use he had put it to. The drug had done its work, and the soul of the suicide had passed away to Him who gave it.

With awe-struck looks they gathered round the body, gazing on the pale countenance of him they had so lately known in health and strength, who with his own hand had broken the seals of life, and, with all his sins about him, had rushed thus guiltily before the judgment-seat of the Creator !

The distant peal came sounding from the far-off spire, as they laid his body in mournful silence on the bed, and left the room to death and solitude. But crouching close beside it, with a low sad whine, the hound still lingered, and still watched on, guarding with jealous care the corpse of its dead master.

The suicide had written in his pocket-book a few short words—his chief request, the forgiveness of those whom he had injured, and only begging of the friends who knew him best, to protect his child, and its poor mother, Nelly Coombs.

Pritchard rubbed his glasses—rubbed them again and again—but for all his polishing, the dew came moistening to his eyes, and dimmed his vision; but he had read enough, and with careful hand tore out the leaf with the address of Nelly's lodgings written on it, placed it in his pocket, and the last wish of Martin Blakeborough was treasured in his memory with as much reverence and regard, as though he had died upon a bed of state, and had had princes for his mourners.

The news of the sad ending was kept a secret from Florence and Mr. Dormer, until the marriage sports were over; and for some days after the young wife never knew the end of Martin Blakeborough, or why her husband and Mr. Pritchard looked so sadly when they returned to the Hall. And while the marriage feast was at its height, and games and reeling mirth went round, and wedding bells gave out their joyous chime, the darkened home of Blakeborough held in its solitary walls the shroudless corpse of its last male

heir ; and as the shade of night gathered about Chase House, a deeper gloom than ever seemed to shut it in ; while, glowing from the top of Black-down Hill, the bonfire blazed, and cast a red reflection over it, gleaming, as the lightning had done, splitting the Fairy Oak, and warning the line of Blakeborough that its race was run.

At the end of another week, the light from glaring torches fell upon a group of men standing round a grave, dug where the cross-roads met, into which they lowered a heavy weight ; then with a stake, cut from the fallen tree, performed the last sad office of the law upon the suicide.

No prayer was uttered, no burial service read over the naked corpse, but, shovelling in the earth, they left it there to mingle with its kindred clay. And when the light from the glaring torches died away, and the moonlight fell upon the new-raised earth, an awful silence reigned around, and the remains of Martin Blakeborough were left to resolve themselves into the elements, and return again, ashes to ashes, dust to dust !

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PRISON SHIP.

A CONVICT ship lay becalmed upon the ocean. From the shrouds the sailors looked below upon the deep, dead sea, waiting for the wind to come to chafe it into foam, and swell out the drooping sails that now hung flapping down against the masts. The colonies were yet a thousand miles away, and sinking in the fiery west, the flaming sun dipped in the far horizon, glowing and hissing in the burning sea, that shone like melted gold. Ten nights and days had the ship been thus becalmed, its black hull motionless upon the solitary waters, or drifting like a log on the currents of the fathomless deep.

There were no clouds, no rain, but all was water, sun, and stars! as day and night dragged out their weary length, and went and came again. Yet night by night there rang throughout the sleeping ship a fearful cry, as though some spirit of the mighty deep had raised its head from out its slimy depths to mock at them, and then sink

down, and leave them listening for the sound to come again. Each night there came that wild, unnatural yell, shrieking in mortal terror throughout the still watches of the night, making the men at last afraid to walk the deck, or sleep within their hammocks.

And who was he who shrieked and cried, when midnight fell upon the ship, and all within its floating ribs were sunk to rest? Some guilty soul, perhaps, oppressed by fearful dreams, that in their shadows pictured forth the dreadful crime he had committed, and as he slept, the likeness of his victim came stalking to his hammock's side, pointing to his gashed throat, and clutching at him with his griping hands. The very convicts chained within the ship turned from the dreamer's side, sinking in terror from him. They had no blood upon *their* heads, although some of them had heavy crimes to answer for, and some for venial offences, fettered side by side with those to whom offence was pastime; for a small fault, banished to a distant shore, to wear their hearts out in useless longing for their homes, their wives, their children, and surrounded by ruffians, hardened in their vices, and reckless in their deeds. Yet one among the lot they all turned from, and could not be brought to herd with, scarcely to

look at him. And he it was who shrieked out in the night, and babbled in his dreams of murder and of death.

Even the tall man, with the cold, calculating face, and sinister eyes, who had been convicted of forgery and theft, but who had saved his neck by betraying his friends and companions, even he shrank from his touch, as from a leper's. But the man still clung to him, followed him about, trying to talk to him of his master, Squire Blakeborough, who had been the tall man's college chum, or telling him how unjustly he had been sentenced for having been found with stolen property in his possession, all along of Joe Ketcher's seeing him carrying a young woman's box, when Mr. Clam—who had been struck off the rolls for something Jerry Starlight, the cracksmen, had said of him for not getting him off, as he had promised—was twice as bad, and went snacks in a little business he knew of, that had been done upstairs, in an out-of-the-way alley leading to the Thames.

But the Captain, as he was called, had heard the man cry out in his sleep, had heard him talk of some one whose throat he had cut, screaming with terror at the vision of the old Jew the nightmare conjured up, as night by night the guilty

creature lay, starting from his dreams, and crying out for mercy. Even the moping figure huddled in a corner, whining and begging for a drink of punch, who had been tried for robbing a mail, even this maudlin wretch, shifted from his corner when the guilty, hollow-eyed, and pale-faced man tried to sit down by him, and said "He was a gentleman, although he was forced to swallow water, without even a dash of brandy in it to give it a flavour, who had staked hundreds on a card, and not an under-footman to a Duke, who did nothing but dream, and talk of what he had been doing in his sleep."

Not a soul in all that prison ship would talk to him, or even sit with him, and day by day the shaking culprit grew more emaciated, his eyes more leaden, dreading to close his weary lids, for fear the stalking figure of the murdered Jew should stoop over him in his hammock, and hold the handle of an old knife out to him, to cut and slash at him again; and when at last exhausted nature closed his heavy eyes, the nightmare came in all its terrors, and then again the shrieking cry would come, and all within the ship blessed themselves free from crimes like his—from murder—and from dreams like his.

And there the vessel lay becalmed, as though

the guilty soul within it hindered its course, and God's judgment against murder chained up the winds, and caused the glowing sun to scorch and blister up its timbers on that calm, dead sea. But day by day, as the sailors watched the closing light, and saw the orb of day sink to its rest, its blood-red glare pierced through each cranny of the ship, glancing through port-holes, and through prison bars, as if to point the murderer out, trying to hide himself from the crimson light, and skulk in a corner.

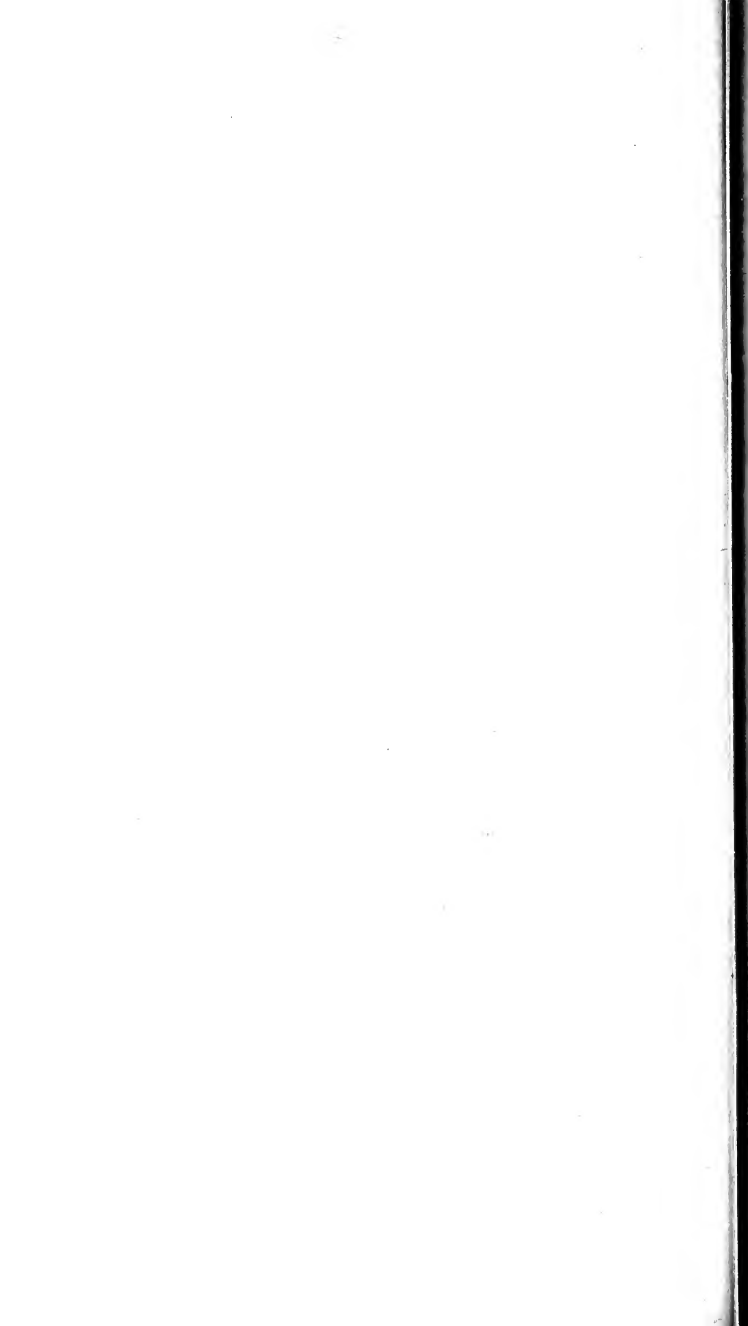
Again the midnight came. While dozing on their watch, the listless men nodded at the useless wheel, or the look-out ahead. Again that fearful shriek came startling the drowsy night, and waking up the silent watch. Again and again it rang throughout the ship, while springing over his hammock's side, and breaking through his frightened guards, a man ran wildly up toward the deck, chasing round it here and there, pursued and haunted by the dreadful shade his dreams had shown him. With a frightful cry, he ran towards a bulk-head, then, with a sudden leap, sprang over the vessel's side; while rushing to the bulwarks, the sailors saw a something white gleam down, its outspread arms uplifted over the blue expanse, then, with a sudden

splash, sink from their sight ! The waters closing over him, shut in their depths the shrieking man, whose cries had startled up the ship as soon as midnight came, and all were sunk in sleep.

The light and baffling winds sprang up, and with its canvas wings outspread, the prison ship sped on its distant way, cresting the billows once again, and on the far-off shores disgorged its convict load, consigning to the safe keeping of a transatlantic jail, to toil and labour out their lives, sotting Tom Bridgeman, and Captain Nicholas Upton.

THE END.







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